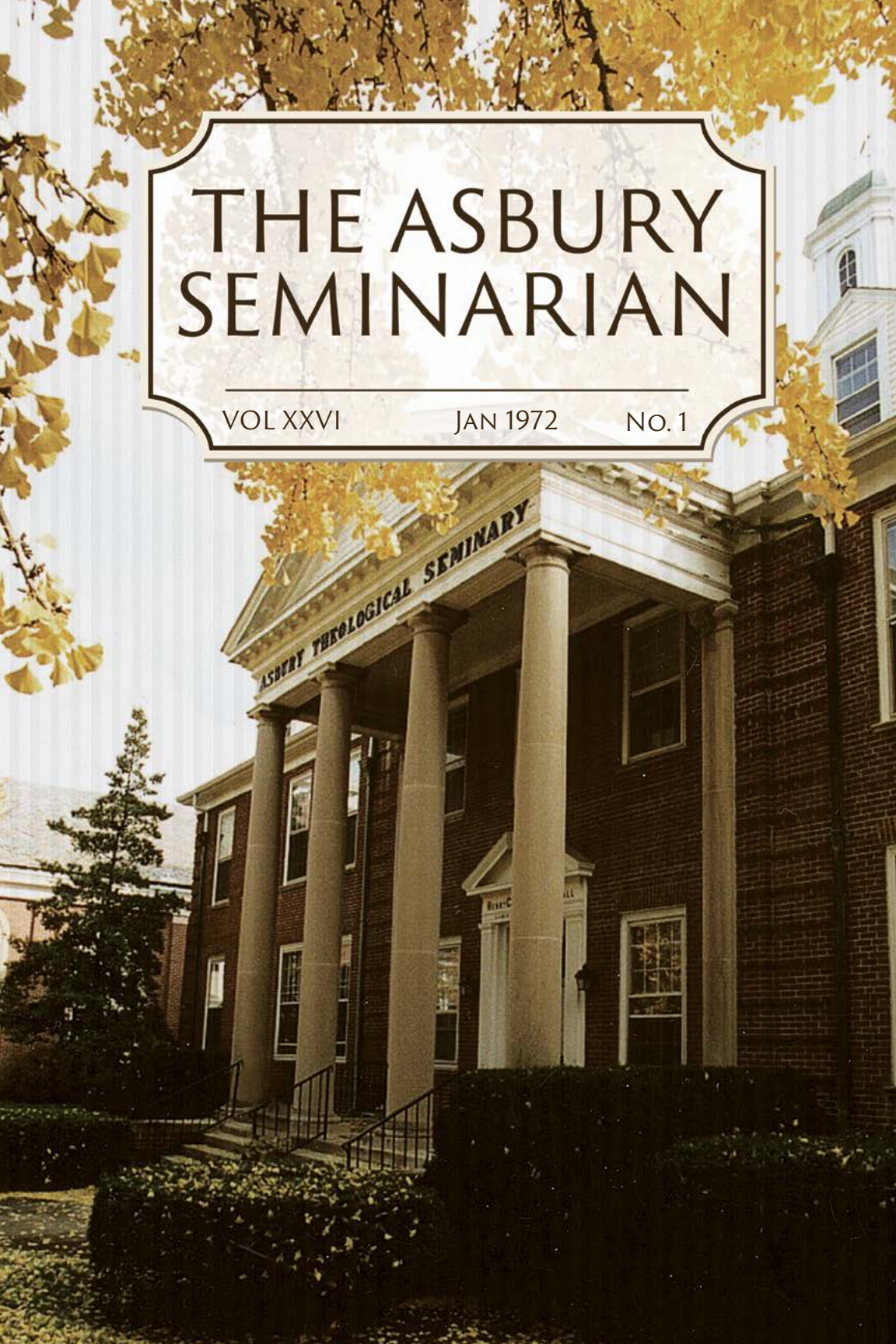


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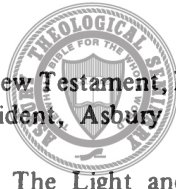
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Francis Asbury Convocation

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Special Edition

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EDITORIAL

AFTER TWO HUNDRED YEARS

Harold B. Kuhn*

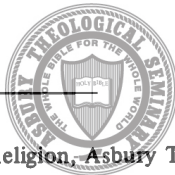
Exactly two hundred years ago this past October, an uncommon man reached the shores of the New World. Nationhood was not yet: five years were to pass before the colonies were to declare their independence; seven more anguishing years of war were to come before that independence should be confirmed decisively.

The man, Francis Asbury, came to wage even more decisive battles—battles for the souls of men and women. Seemingly frail in body, and with little “formal” training for the special tasks before him, Asbury penetrated the wilderness that bounded the fringe of colonies along the Coast with a tenacious vigor matched only by the strength of the Message which he bore.

For over forty years, he traversed the Appalachians and the Alleghenies. Horse and saddle were his outward hallmarks. But within his warm heart there burned the distinctive emphases already articulated by the Wesleys—in words by John Wesley, in song by the gentler Minnesinger, Charles. By the miracle which only the Holy Spirit could work in his own heart, Francis Asbury made the message of the Wesleys to match the urgent and compelling needs of the American frontier.

To men and women faced by the harsh contingencies of frontier life, Asbury laid ceaseless emphasis upon the certainty of the Witness of the Spirit. To those who had sought and found peace with God in Christ, and who were confronted by the impurity and coarseness which accompanied the cutting edge of civilization, he offered purity of heart through the sanctifying ministry of that same Spirit who had borne testimony “with their spirits,” to sonship.

Reading the Chronicle of Francis Asbury’s itinerant ministry almost wearies the modern, comfort-loving reader. The establishing of



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Churches, the inauguration of Camp Meetings, the organizing and holding of Annual Conferences—these were Asbury's meat and drink. There followed in the wake of his ministry a quality of life—of sainthood if you will—which made Methodists to stand out amid the harshness and vulgarity of the times.

It was fitting that the Asbury institutions should give special recognition to the advent of Francis Asbury in America. Asbury College and Asbury Theological Seminary paused in their appointed instructional tasks for two days as on October 26–28, a surprisingly large group of visitors joined the Asbury community to hear distinguished speakers remind them of their legacy from the Preacher on Horseback—and from his black co-worker.

The Asbury Seminarian is privileged to bring to its readers the messages which thrilled those who shared in the Bicentennial Convocation. We commend to all who wish to look into the dynamics of the grand little Englishman, Francis Asbury, the keynote sermon by President Stanger of the Seminary, and the carefully drawn messages of the distinguished visitors who came to our campuses to remind us at Asbury of our heritage. This legacy was portrayed not as a museum piece, but as both living and adequate for our time.



ARTICLES

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Frank Bateman Stanger*

Let me begin by reading some passages from Holy Scripture:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit . . . (Acts 2:1–4a).

. . . Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law . . . The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (Galatians 5:16–18, 22–25).

And then a further word of Scripture, as recorded in Acts 19:1,2–“ . . . Paul . . . came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? . . .” There has been a lot of discussion concerning whether these last three words should read “since you believed” or “when you believed.” I came across a very competent commentator the other day who said,



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"What difference does it make? It is still the same question: Have you received the Holy Spirit?"

My subject this morning is I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT. Will you begin saying the Apostles' Creed with me, but be prepared to stop when I give you the sign:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

What do you believe? This is the important question. Some folks do *not* really believe in the Holy Spirit at all. An interesting story has come out of antebellum days. The master arrived back on the plantation after hearing a very forceful sermon on the Holy Spirit which had irritated him greatly. As he walked along the path to his house, one of his slaves heard him mutter, "There isn't any Holy Spirit." The slave, who was a deeply religious person, finally got the nerve to say, "Massa, if I was you, I would say, 'As far as I knows, there isn't any Holy Spirit.'" Or take the preacher in the Southwest who stood before his large congregation one autumn Sunday morning and said, "You know, the Holy Spirit is like the football spirit. You have to catch it to know what it is." What a tragic lack of understanding of the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit.

There are other people who *over-believe* in the Holy Spirit. These are they who attribute ministries and works to the Holy Spirit that He never promised to perform. For instance, the Holy Spirit never promised to give guidance without the use of common sense. He never promised to aid in the process of maturity without the practice of discipline. He never promised to make it possible for a person to perform magical feats for the sake of ecstatic satisfaction or personal popularity. And, further, I do not believe that the Holy Spirit gives approval for the bypassing of moral and ethical principles in personal living under any circumstances.

There are others who attribute to the Holy Spirit words and works for which He is not responsible. There is a professor in a Roman Catholic college in the western part of this state who has made a life-long study of the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. He said to a

friend of mine, "The Holy Spirit is so misunderstood and there is so much confusion about what He really says and does that some day I may write a book on the Holy Spirit entitled: **THINGS THEY MADE ME DO AND SAY**. Some people over-believe in the Holy Spirit.

But I suppose the great problem, the major problem, is the fact that far too many people who profess to be Christians *under-believe* in the Holy Spirit. There are some who say His ministry was limited to the Early Church. There are others who say that His continuing ministry is related only to official acts of state and church. There are others who believe that if you really follow the Holy Spirit in our day, there is created an irresolvable dichotomy between the spiritual and the secular. These say that truly spiritual individuals dare have no personal relationships to the secular world in any of its mundane activities.

There are others who under-believe in the Holy Spirit by hesitating to accept the validity of His personal ministries which are delineated in the Gospels, in the Acts, and in the Epistles. For instance, the eighth chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans presents at least thirteen ministries of the Holy Spirit to the individual. Let me mention but four of them—very personal ministries—but people seem hesitant to accept them. Paul says the Spirit can give deliverance from sin. How we under-believe the Holy Spirit when we do not believe this and refuse to live in the reality of it. Paul also says that the Holy Spirit can give us a new mind and we can get rid of the carnal mind. The Holy Spirit makes possible a "spiritual mind." Paul says, furthermore, that the Holy Spirit is able to touch our mortal bodies with moment-by-moment healing. The promise is that He will quicken our mortal bodies. How many of us really believe this each day? Paul also says in Romans 8 that the Holy Spirit is available for every kind of needed guidance. He is the Spirit of guidance. But in spite of all this spiritual truth we find multitudes of professing Christians who under-believe the Holy Spirit.

It is my conviction that we need not only to believe in the Holy Spirit, but we need to know what we believe about the Holy Spirit. Within the last month I received a letter from a fellow alumnus and I am quoting verbatim: "Our training at Asbury, while convincing to us, did not provide us with many answers which we would like to be able to present from an intelligent viewpoint." Perhaps this is representative of many Christians. It is not enough to say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," we need to know what we believe about the Holy Spirit. So I would like this morning during this Francis Asbury Convocation to declare five personal affirmations about the Holy Spirit. I understand

that one of the purposes of this message is to be a springboard for the Methodist Class Meetings which are to follow. I hope you will take these affirmations, look at them honestly in the light of Scripture, and perhaps all of us will come to some more basic centralities and certainties in our thinking.

First, I BELIEVE THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS ALWAYS AT WORK. The Holy Spirit is God and Christ at work in our world. This means that the activity of the Holy Spirit is both the evidence of the continuing creativity of God and the contemporary authenticity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I believe that the Holy Spirit is everywhere, always. I do not think that He has to be coaxed to work. I think He only has to be given an opportunity to work. We give Him an opportunity to work by getting all the hindrances and barriers out of the way so that His ever-active ministry in the world can be made manifest at all times.

When you and I think of the continuing activities of the Holy Spirit, we need to realize that He works both in predictable and in unpredictable ways. There are many areas of spiritual activity for which we do not have to plead with God to allow the Holy Spirit to work. It has already been promised that He will work in these areas. For instance, when we read the Bible we know He is at work enlightening and convicting and inspiring. When we pray, when we worship corporately, when we receive the sacraments, when we participate in Christian fellowship, when we witness, when we love, when we perform any of these spiritual ministries characteristic of New Testament Christianity, we can be assured that the Holy Spirit has already promised to work through them and will work. We need to accept the fact that there are predictable ways in which the Spirit always works. Every worship service of the church—this service—should be a time when the Holy Spirit is working. If His work is not being manifest then it is because we are not letting Him work.

But we must never forget the fact of the unpredictable activities of the Holy Spirit. This is a universe not only of the predictable but also of the unpredictable. A scientist wrote recently in "The Christian Science Monitor" about our unpredictable universe, how suddenly something will appear or something will happen in the physical universe that nobody predicted. The Spirit also works this way. Jesus, likening the Spirit to the wind, said that "it blows where it wills." We see it in divine providence. We see it in answers to prayer. We see it in the changing of human vocations. We see it in revival movements. We see it in miracles of healing. I am wondering if we do not also see it in certain

social revolutions. We must remember that the Holy Spirit works within unpredicted ways as well as those that are predictable.

This, then, is my first basic affirmation about the Holy Spirit. I believe that the Holy Spirit is always at work.

My second affirmation is this: **I BELIEVE IN THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE WESLEYAN INSISTENCE UPON THE ADDED DIMENSION OF THE SPIRIT'S ACTIVITY IN ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION.** Entire sanctification—Christian perfection—perfect love—was one of the great centralities in the ministry of Francis Asbury. Listen to him: “Preach sanctification directly or indirectly in every sermon. Oh, Purity! Oh, Christian Perfection! Oh, Sanctification! It is heaven below to feel all sin removed. Preach it whether they hear or forbear—preach it.” On his 68th visit to North Carolina, he wrote, “I am divinely impressed with a charge to preach sanctification in every sermon.” Preaching in Baltimore shortly before his death, after chastising the Baltimoreans for their regression, Asbury exclaimed aloud, “Come back! Come back! Oh ye Methodists, come back to the first principles, and God will make us a cyclone of fire, sweeping around the world and subduing all nations!”

Entire sanctification—Christian holiness—is the hallmark of Methodism. Herbert W. Richardson, Associate Professor of Theology at St. Michael's College in Toronto, writing on “The Holy Spirit and Protestantism,” suggested that the real Reformation took place under John Wesley. The early reforms instituted by Luther dealt merely with the seat of authority and left the aspirations of the masses untouched. But, suggests Professor Richardson, Wesley in his stress on holiness shifted the attention of religion from the state to the soul and thereby gave the common people a sense of their potential.

Truly one of the distinct features of the early Wesleyan emphasis was that perfection is for everyman. To Wesley, perfection was a practical way of life available to and necessary for every regenerate Christian. A contemporary writer has suggested that it was the idea of a “second blessing” that made perfection peculiarly Methodist.

I believe in this added dimension of the Spirit's activity in entire sanctification. God is calling us to a Spirit-filled, Spirit-empowered life. God is offering us a baptism with the Holy Spirit. This call and offer come to us as Christians. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not something that is automatically received when a man first becomes a Christian disciple. This is a separate gift of God. It is called “the Promise of the Father.”

What does it mean to receive such a baptism of the Spirit? For one thing it means a rejection of the sovereignty of all unholy spirits. I believe in a spirit-world. There are both good and evil spirits. People can be misguided into thinking they are under the influence of the Holy Spirit when actually they may be under the influence of an unholy spirit. A continuing responsibility of the Christian is to "try the spirits" to see whether they be of God. The reception of the baptism of the Holy Spirit results in the rejection of the sovereignty of all unholy spirits.

But it means more than this. It also means a refutation of the supposed sufficiency of the human spirit. Here is a crucial area for most of us, whether we are clergy or laity, preachers or teachers or church officials. We are good people. We have good motivations. We plan good things. We want to succeed for the sake of Christ's Kingdom. But we have a tendency to substitute the sufficiency of the human spirit for the indispensable power of the Holy Spirit. We need to hear again the Word of God spoken through the ancient prophet, which is as true this morning as when it was first uttered: "Not by might," however legitimate that might is; "nor by power," however necessary certain power structures may be; "but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." How magnificently Bishop Kenneth Copeland expressed it last night, "I am not able. *HE* is able."

This is God's call to us—to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Two things will inevitably happen when you and I receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. First of all, there will be an inner cleansing. The baptism of the Holy Spirit does something within the individual. Call it "cleansing." Call it "purity." Or call it "wholeness." Something happens within the individual that makes possible what the Apostle Paul called the growth of the fruit of the Spirit.

Let me share with you what a contemporary Methodist minister has said about the possibility of inner purity:

Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Instead of throwing up your hands in despair or throwing away your hunger for God in reversion to some lesser idol, seek it. Seek it for ten years, for twenty years, for thirty. Are we to refuse the challenge of the quest? On this would I venture my eternal salvation—if you will make the purity of God your quest, the God of purity will give Himself to you, in such fullness, that your questions will be transcended in the splendor of the experience which has overtaken you.

Something else also happens when we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you." We must not be confused about what it means to have spiritual power. Unfortunately in our day, and it is doubtless due to the prevailing sensate culture pattern of society, too many have the idea that power means the ability to do something sensational or spectacular. This is not the New Testament concept of spiritual power. The meaning of power is adequacy, the ability to achieve purpose. The Holy Spirit makes it possible for a Christian to *be* and to *do* what God intends.

The ability to *be*—the Holy Spirit gives adequacy to reproduce Christ within one's personality and life. The ability to *do*—the Holy Spirit gives adequacy to proclaim Christ to those beyond us, to move through God's world as His witnesses.

William Barclay speaks of the Holy Spirit as the person who enables us to cope with life. The word "comforter," which is applied to the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures, has in it the Latin adjective "fortis" which means "brave." A "comforter" is one who puts courage into a man. And how we need this courage in our day—to *be* and to *do* what God appoints.

I believe in the authenticity of the Wesleyan insistence upon the added dimension of the Spirit's activity in the work of entire sanctification. This emphasis is what Methodism in our day needs more than anything else.

I have shared with you two of my basic affirmations about the Holy Spirit. I have three more affirmations to discuss. Because of the brief time remaining I can deal with these only in a very summary fashion.

Thirdly, I BELIEVE IN LIFE-IN-THE-SPIRIT AS WELL AS IN BELIEF-IN-THE-SPIRIT AND EXPERIENCE-IN-THE-SPIRIT. Sanctification has been described as a flower of three petals: a doctrine to be believed; an experience to be received; a life to be achieved. When we talk about Life-in-the-Spirit we need to distinguish between three concepts in the New Testament Scriptures—"gift," "gifts," "fruit." The GIFT of the Holy Spirit refers to the Christian's personal experience of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a universal offer. The GIFTS of the Holy Spirit refer to the ministries of the Spirit through personal service. These are always particular and selective, in accordance with the wisdom of God. The FRUIT of the Spirit has reference to spiritual maturity in one's sanctified life. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering,

gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Such fruit is certainly a universal possibility for Spirit-filled Christians.

What is the secret of this Life-in-the-Spirit, this maturing in spiritual experience? The secret, first of all, is the indwelling, abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. But there is also the imperative of spiritual disciplines. Albert E. Day writes: "The continuity of God's Grace is dependent upon the practice of the grace of self-mastery." The fruit of the Spirit in one's life is dependent upon the cultivation of the seeds of the Spirit within, through the disciplined responses of love.

Here is my fourth affirmation about the Holy Spirit: **I BELIEVE THAT THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS INDISSOLUBLY RELATED TO JESUS CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH.** When we become attached to the Holy Spirit we do not bypass either Christ or the church. If your so-called spiritual experience is leading you around either Christ or the church, you are not following the Holy Spirit. To be filled with the Holy Spirit means to be filled with Jesus Christ. Our Master said: "I will send you another comforter. He will live within you." Who is the first comforter? Jesus. Now another one is coming. The second comforter will be like the first comforter. What does it mean to be spiritual? How often we have used this term. It is so easy to say, "He is spiritual" or "She isn't spiritual." How do we judge true spirituality? To be spiritual means to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and to be filled with the Holy Spirit means to be filled with Christ. Therefore to be spiritual means to be filled with Jesus Christ.

Nor does the Holy Spirit bypass the church. There is no antithesis between the Spirit and the Church of Jesus Christ. The Revelation of our Lord reaches a climax as the Spirit *and the Bride* say "Come." (Rev. 22:17). A study of church history reveals that the great movements of the Holy Spirit across the centuries have been related to the church. In this regard remember that Methodism in its beginnings was one of the greatest movements of the Spirit that the world has ever witnessed. The Holy Spirit is at work in our world, building the Church of Jesus Christ, and preparing the Bride for the "marriage supper of the Lamb."

Finally, **I BELIEVE THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE SPIRIT OF HOPE.** I believe that one of the evidences of the abounding presence of the Holy Spirit will be found in the manifestation of that spiritual mood which John Henry Jowett called "apostolic optimism." I see the Holy Spirit creating hope in several areas. First of all, the Holy Spirit gives me the hope that I can be victorious as a Christian. Secondly, the Holy Spirit gives me the hope that the redemptive ministries of the

church will be effective. Thirdly, the Holy Spirit gives me the hope that Christ is fulfilling His purposes in history. Christ is not merely above history. Christ is not merely beyond history. It is not adequate merely to say that someday Christ will come back into history. The Holy Spirit inspires me with the belief that Christ is in history, that God is working out His purposes now in our world. And the Holy Spirit gives me the further hope that ultimately there will be ushered in the eternal kingdom of God. Then we will understand what it means when the Word declares "The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever." Hallelujah!

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT. I believe that the Holy Spirit is always at work. I believe in the authenticity of the Wesleyan insistence upon the added dimension of the Spirit's activity in the work of entire sanctification. I believe in Life-in-the-Spirit as well as in belief-in-the-Spirit and experience-in-the-Spirit. I believe that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is indissolubly related to Jesus Christ and His Church. I believe that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Hope.

And now a closing word. The power of the Holy Spirit in the church and in the world begins with His presence and ministry in the individual person. We read Acts 2 and Galatians 5 and we thrill as we recognize the realization of all of this in the experience of the great-hearts of faith through the Christian centuries. But we always come back to the very thing that Paul asked the churchmen at Ephesus: "Have you received the Holy Spirit?"

There may be some here this morning who want to receive Him. The steps are well defined. *First* of all, believe Christ's imperative and Christ's promise about the Spirit. Recognize what Christ said about the impossibility of living for Christ or doing Christ's work apart from the personal ministry and power of the Holy Spirit. And while you are believing His imperatives about the Spirit, also believe His promise: "I will give Him to you." *Second*, confess your need of spiritual power. "I have tried to do it myself, I have depended upon what I thought I had, but it has not been adequate. I must find another source of power for this business of living for Christ and representing Christ to others." *Third*, make a total surrender of your self. Surrender not merely this thing or that thing or some other thing in your life. It is going to mean that you hand over your entire self to the Spirit. There must come that decisive moment when I say to God, "I no longer have any right to myself. I am Thine, entirely Thine." *Finally*, after we have surrendered we find it our spiritual delight to enter into a continuing covenant

of obedience with our Lord, as the Holy Spirit comes into our lives in His fulness to abide.

Have you received the Holy Spirit in His fulness? If you have not, and if you want to, will you do it while I pray?

LET US PRAY:

And now, Lord, we open our total selves to Thee—our minds, our emotions, our bodies, our wills. We hand over to Thee everything that we have and are capable of ever having. We hand over to Thee what we are and anything that we may be capable of becoming. We present all our members as living sacrifices, and we now thank Thee for the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Help us to go forth in the power of the Spirit. Amen.

Delivered at The Francis Asbury Convocation, Wilmore, Kentucky, on October 27, 1971.



FRANCIS ASBURY PROPHETIC ITINERANT AND DESIGNER OF AMERICAN METHODISM

William R. Cannon*

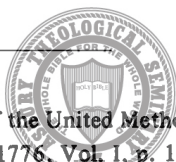
On the eve of the fourth of July, 1971, began the five-year celebration of the two-hundredth anniversary of our birth as a nation. Presumably the climax will come at a big national birthday party on July 4, 1976.

President Richard M. Nixon, Chief Justice Warren E. Burger, and Speaker of the House of Representatives Carl Albert were the spokesmen on this inaugural occasion. An army choir sang "America the Beautiful," "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," and "The Star-Spangled Banner." The program was conducted from the Archives Building on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D. C., where the great documents of our history are preserved. The three speeches were sober, judicious, and provided admonitions for our citizenry which, if heeded, will help to preserve as well as improve the nation's future. I found the occasion interesting and to a degree even inspiring. It was intensely patriotic, yet not offensively so, for its dignity and emotional restraint conveyed to me a sense of the abiding nobility of the ideals and basic purposes of our national life.

I decided, as my way of observing the fourth of July, to read, on the next afternoon, what Asbury had written in his journal for the year 1776. I wondered what this fourth of July might have looked like to a contemporary. I was curious about the whole year of 1776 as the total context for this red-letter day in history. I knew how careful Asbury was about keeping up with events through the daily

*Bishop of the Raleigh Area of the United Methodist Church.

1. *Journal*, September 9, 1776, Vol. 1, p. 199, I have used: *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*. Ed. Elmer T. Clark, J. Manning Potts, and Jack S. Payton, London: Epworth Press, Nashville: Abingdon Press.



entries in his journal. But you can imagine how surprised and disappointed I was to find that the fourth of July, 1776, was omitted. He made an entry in his journal on Friday, July the eleventh. But for the twelve days previous there is nothing at all.

News travelled slowly in those days. Though Asbury was in Maryland, close by Philadelphia, when the fourth of July came, there was no way for him to have heard immediately what our Founding Fathers did on that momentous day. Yet his meticulous journal winds its weary way, like the man who penned it, to December nineteenth, 1776, and still has no mention whatever of what happened in Philadelphia on July fourth. Was it that Asbury never heard? Not likely, for he heard most everything else. He kept well abreast of the military events; at least he knew enough about them to worry over them. Was he unpatriotic, still enough of an ardent Britisher to support crown over colony, and therefore preferred silence to salute about an event such as independence? To assume this to be the explanation is to be unfair to Asbury, for the only criticism I can find he made in writing of Mr. Wesley between 1771 and 1776 is the criticism of his attitude toward the Americans in their revolt against England. While he was in Pennsylvania he wrote in his journal: "I also received an affectionate letter from Mr. Wesley, and am truly sorry that the venerable man ever dipped into the politics of America—However, it discovers Mr. Wesley's conscientious attachment to the government under which he lived. Had he been a subject of America, no doubt he would have been as zealous an advocate of the American Cause."² Was Asbury just careless and indifferent, too preoccupied with what he was about at the moment to notice what was taking place about him? Perhaps there was some of this in his failure to record his thoughts on the events for which the fourth of July stood. This does not mean that in disposition Asbury was naturally indifferent, lackadaisical, or incapable of close observation. He had keen insight into most everything to which he gave attention. It means simply that he was indifferent to some things because at the time of their occurrence he was preoccupied with something else.

Asbury opposed war. Anything that promoted the conflict between England and the colonies was anathema to him, no matter



from what side it came. He feared many had already “so imbibed a martial spirit that they had lost the spirit of pure undefiled religion.”³ Norfolk, in Virginia, which he thought when he first visited it was excruciatingly hot, a heat he had never known in England,⁴ but which, when he had to leave, he admitted had pleased him more than any other place he had ever been,⁵ was burnt to the ground by order of the governor.⁶ “But alas!” he opined, “We hear of bloodshed and slaughter, many immortal souls are driven to eternity by the bloody sword. This is a grief to my soul! Lord, scatter them that delight in war, and thirst for human blood! It is well for the righteous that this is not their home. No: they are blessed with a pacific spirit, and are bound for a kingdom of peace . . .”⁷

In this regard, I am afraid, Asbury did not see where the principles of the Declaration of Independence might well lead. He was blinded by the fury through which men had to go to achieve independence. And frankly, he doubted that it was worth the cost. He was alarmed by the military accounts from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. His prayer was: May the Lord overrule, “and make all things subservient to the spiritual welfare of his church.”⁸ He used war and rumors of war solely to support his moral and spiritual lessons. When, for example, it was reported that the man-of-war was in the river, and the town was all in commotion, Asbury’s comment was:

“Alas, for fallen man! He fears his fellow creatures, whose breath is in their nostrils, but fears not Him who is able to destroy body and soul in hell. If fire and sword and a small distance can so alarm us, how will poor impenitent sinners be alarmed when they find, by woeful experience, that they must drink the wine of the wrath of God, poured out without mixture?”⁹

He felt his own vocation to be the best of all. And he defined that vocation with exactness. “What a noble and delightful employment

3. *Journal*, April 23, 1776, Vol. I, 184.

4. *Journal*, June 29, 1775, Vol. I, 159.

5. *Journal*, January 24, 1776, Vol. I, 178.

6. *Journal*, January 10, 1776, Vol. I, 176.

7. *Journal*, September 5, 1776, Vol. I, 198–199

8. *Journal*, April 30, 1775, Vol. I, 155.

9. *Journal*, March 8, 1776, Vol. I, 180.

is ours, to be nursing immortal souls for realms of eternal glory.”¹⁰ He entrusted politics, the organization of society, and the affairs of state to others. He was able in the year 1776 to testify that his soul “was fixed on God as on its centre, though in the midst of tumult.

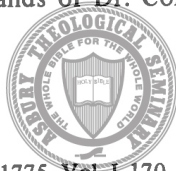
Glory to God! I can leave all the little affairs of this confused world to those men to whose province they pertain; and can comfortably go on in my proper business of instrumentally saving my own soul and those that hear me.”¹¹

Therefore, nowhere in his journal for the year 1776 do we find any mention whatever of the Continental Congress, the representatives there of the thirteen colonies, the Declaration of Independence, or the hope of a free and independent America. Instead, what we hear about are sin and sinners, congregations and revivals, “melting times” for the human heart, and the glorious salvation of people through the preached word.

Yet Asbury, who omits many of the affairs with which today his church is so greatly concerned, and mentions so much that we appear to have forgotten, is styled “the prophetic itinerant” and is reckoned by all to be “the designer of American Methodism” How can this have happened?

Any student of ecclesiastical history over any wide range of time and broad stretch of geography knows that a reciprocal process has marked the relationship of the church to the world and of the world to the church. Whenever anything has happened positively and constructively between the two, the church has influenced the world, and likewise, to an extent at least, the world has influenced the church. Christianity converted pagan Rome, and in doing so Christians discarded the speech and dress of oriental Jewery and adopted that of the society in which they were then living and working.

Asbury was more American than he himself realized. By taking no public notice of American institutions and social functions and perhaps being honestly unaware of their influence on him, he none the less shaped his movement in keeping with their demands. For example, he graciously accepted the Sunday Service with all its ritualistic details from Mr. Wesley at the hands of Dr. Coke only to discard it on the



10. *Journal*, December 11, 1775, Vol. I, 170.

11. *Journal*, March 26, 1776, Vol. I, 182.

frontier and put in its place the ready language of the people through spontaneous prayers and exciting testimonies. He called himself "Bishop" and indeed conducted himself as one just as surely as a mediaeval prelate and an Anglican Lord, but he gave up the vestments when Jesse Lee poked fun at his long black gown and little white bands. But most important of all, he showed without equivocation that he was truly American and knew the real meaning of the Declaration of Independence when at the Christmas Conference of 1784 he refused to allow himself to be consecrated for the General Superintendency until he had been elected to that office by the brethren.

President Nixon on the eve of the Fourth of July, 1971, quoted from one of the documents of our history that government is derived from the consent of the governed. Asbury accepted and illustrated this American principle for the Methodist Church just as surely and completely as our forefathers did for this nation. That is a part of the sociological reason why Methodism was the fastest growing religious movement and the Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Episcopal Church, South, were the most influential churches throughout most of American history. The other part of the same reason, for which Asbury also was responsible, is our connectional system, centralized, powerful, and effective, for it corresponds with a strong federalized republican government in which the executive branch has the authority to carry out its responsibilities. These two aspects of our church are superlative examples of the influence of the American Society on the Methodist Church and the Church's ability to adjust to her world. This new book by a man who served as senior editor of *Reader's Digest* entitled *Organizing to Beat the Devil, Methodists in the Making of America*¹² shows to even the superficial reader that the expanding Methodist Church in the nineteenth century was growing America in microcosm.

Though it is true that Asbury was influenced by his environment and that the church he organized shows unmistakably the impact of the world of pioneer America on it, at the same time Asbury influenced this country. His new church was one of the most powerful forces in shaping the character of people and the society they designed for themselves and their posterity to live in. This Republic would have been a



different and probably much less desirable country had Francis Asbury not loved it for Christ's sake and worked assiduously for its redemption.

Indeed, his labors compassed the length and breadth of the land, and his itinerary was co-extensive with the bounds of the nation in his day. Every year in his episcopal visitations he visited most every state in the union. It is fascinating to take a map of the country in the early nineteenth century and on that map follow him, mile by mile, on an episcopal journey. In early September he would leave New York City, cross to Wilmington and Philadelphia, go south to Baltimore and thence, often by boat, to Norfolk, to work Virginia. He would go down to North Carolina near Raleigh and work out from there into the deep South visiting South Carolina and Georgia. Then, he would plunge westward into Tennessee and up through what was then the wilderness of Kentucky, returning to eastern Tennessee and over the west side of the Alleghenies through Virginia to Uniontown, Pennsylvania. From there he would cross the Alleghenies into the East by Laurel Hill and Cumberland to Baltimore and New York. From New York he would go up through Connecticut and Massachusetts to Lynn, pass back through the valley of Connecticut to Northampton, and over the Berkshire Hills to Albany. He would then take the Hudson Valley route to New York City, reaching there at the end of August. Thus he would have consumed an entire year in travel.¹³

The pattern was capable of almost infinite variety. It was reliably alike in one aspect, namely, that the Bishop got most everywhere in the span of a year. He had no episcopal headquarters. His office was wherever he happened to be at the time. It was more on the back of a moving horse than anywhere else.

When Wesley's missionary first landed at Philadelphia in 1771, he did not rent a house or hire lodgings in somebody else's home. He made no arrangements for his board either. He just set out riding, stopping for food wherever he might happen to be at meal time and sleeping wherever anyone would give him shelter when night fell. He took to the Long Road when he first reached America, and he was still on it forty-five years later when his last host Death reached him to invite him to his permanent home in heaven. He did not especially enjoy

13. A sample of this, with modifications made in relation to other years, is his itinerary for the period of September, 1791, through August, 1792. *Journal*, Vol. I, 693-728.



travel. It was hard on him and irksome to him. He confessed in the first year of the nineteenth century: "My soul hath been kept in quiet peace; but I feel the effects of riding a stiff, aged, failing horse, with a sore back, and my saddle is old and worn."¹⁴ Yet he never showed any disposition to discontinue travelling. "I have travelled so much," he said, "that it seems like confinement to rest one day; I hope I shall travel as long as I live; Travelling is my health, life, and all, for soul and body." "I am always on the wing," he explained, "but it is for God." In his annual travels he exceeded even Mr. Wesley, but then his territory was geographically larger and his work more extensive. A stranger met Asbury on the plains of Ohio and asked him where he was from. Asbury replied, "From Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, or almost any place you please."¹⁵ The man to whom he replied no doubt thought he was joking, but we know now that he was telling the straight truth. "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head."

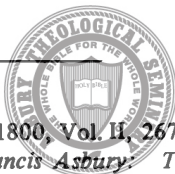
Saint Paul said that he knew how both to be abased and to abound. Francis Asbury did too. He had a few nice homes which he delighted to visit. He was entertained with reverential respect at Perry Hall, near Baltimore, one of the most elegant dwellings in rural America. The Governor's mansion was open to him in the state of New York and in Ohio as well. Richard Bassett welcomed him in Delaware, and General Russell's wife, who was the sister of Patrick Henry, gave him hospitality in the West Virginia Heights. He found that Freeborn Garrettson's home on the Hudson River was always true to its name of "Traveller's Rest." It was that to him, and he loved it as Jesus must have loved the home of Martha and Mary at Bethany. There were simple places, too, where he found solace and strength. The Widow Boone's was one of them. Her family had been entertaining Methodist preachers for six and twenty years.¹⁶

But most of the time the Bishop was crowded into a one-room cabin where the family carried on its entire indoor life twenty-four hours in the day. It was kitchen, parlor, and bedroom—all three in one. English people love privacy. Asbury never got over this phase of old-

14. *Journal*, November 29, 1800, Vol. II, 267.

15. Ezra Squier Tipple, *Francis Asbury: The Prophet of the Long Road*, N. Y.—Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1916. Pp. 158–159.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 173–174.



world life. He missed privacy more than anything else. He would try to arise before the family did in order to do his daily devotions, reading, and meditation alone. It is amazing that despite such conditions he usually got in three hours of private prayer every day¹⁷ and one hundred pages of reading before sundown.¹⁸ When the weather was dry and clear and warm, he would retreat to the woods for his intellectual and spiritual exercises. But in cold and falling weather, he had to isolate himself in thought in the midst of others. Like Saint Ambrose of Milan in the fourth century he could do intellectual work with people crowded all about him.

Not only did he have to share a room with others but sometimes a bed as well. He was of such nature that he contracted every communicable disease about him. He had colds constantly and frequently could not preach because of a "putrid, sore throat." As he came out of primitive Kentucky, he developed a skin disease, presumably the seven-year itch. It did not last that long, however.

He was poor and underpaid and had to accept hospitality wherever he could get it. Though no ecumenist, he stayed once with a Presbyterian minister, detesting all the while his theories of election. He even put up in a tavern because the owner offered him hospitality. That night he gave a lecture to the customers, and the tavern-keeper and his wife were deeply affected and showed some concern about their souls.¹⁹ One Easter Sunday he rode up to a large, inviting-looking house, but when the occupants offered him some brandy to drink he made a hasty retreat.²⁰

Not only did Asbury suffer privation and hardship throughout his ministry, but he risked personal danger and discomfort in the performance of his mission. In the year 1777, while the camp fever raged among the troops,²¹ decimating their military strength,²² Asbury's chaise was shot through on the way to Annapolis, Maryland. A ferryman cursed him after a ride in a flatboat across the Deep River because Asbury had no silver coin to pay him for the ride.²³ He was always in

17. *Journal*, December 8, 1776, Vol. I, 206.

18. *Journal*, July 29, 1776, Vol. I, 195.

19. *Journal*, July 15, 1776, Vol. I, 192.

20. Tipple, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

21. *Journal*, January 7, 1777, Vol. I, 227.

22. *Journal*, February 4, 1777, Vol. I, 230.

23. Tipple, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

danger. Wolves followed him. His old horse fell again and again. He got lost in the swamps of South Carolina at night as he forded the Catawba River; he landed among the rocks and even in a whirlpool. His horse skidded on ice. He and his beast were beaten down by a hail storm. He was pursued by ruffians, and a bullet grazed his head as he road through a forest.²⁴ The dear man was constantly abused as, for example, when "Mr. Chase, not contented with his unkind and abusive letter" kept on "exerting all his unfriendly force," that is influencing as many people as he could against Asbury so that he had to admit, "I feel myself aggrieved."²⁵

Despite this Asbury kept his head above water. He managed himself as well as his career. He was able to travel on horseback as many as three hundred miles in six days and five hundred miles in nine days.²⁶ Indeed, when he was sixty-six years old, he calculated he had travelled five thousand miles per year for the past seven years.²⁷ He was not strong physically. He was almost never well. Sickness and disease plagued his every step. How did he do it? How did this frail man carry out so successfully such a stupendous mission? Asbury himself gives the answer. He wrote early in his career and proved what he had written all the way: "When the mind is reconciled to duties and difficulties, then that which was hard becomes easy."²⁸

The outcome of these prodigious labors was the Methodist Episcopal Church. Despite Mr. Wesley's claim that he alone was the founder of Methodism and that Asbury in America was only the elder brother in a family of many sons,²⁹ there would have been no Methodist Church as we know it without Asbury. Indeed, Mr. Wesley had not intended his followers ever to separate from the Church of England. Only the exigencies created by the war and the birth of the new nation forced him to do what he did in 1784. What came out of 1784 was not Mr. Wesley's doings at all but rather was the result of the strong leadership Bishop Asbury gave to the American brethren. They were now

24. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

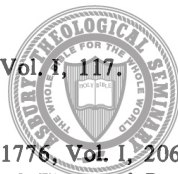
25. *Journal*, June 1, 1774, Vol. I, 117.

26. Tipple, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

28. *Journal*, December 10, 1776, Vol. I, 206.

29. Luke Tyerman, *Life and Times of Rev. John Wesley*. N. Y.: Harper and Brothers, 1872. Vol. II, 438.



self-confident enough to feel no longer dependent on directions from over-seas. They refused outright to ordain Brother Whatcoat a General Superintendent when Mr. Wesley instructed them to do so. Indeed, Wesley's desire for it delayed Whatcoat's election to the episcopacy. He did not become a bishop until after Mr. Wesley's death, and the choice was freely made by the brethren. Freeborn Garrettson never became a bishop, though he, too, had been Mr. Wesley's choice.

The American system of church government is radically different from the British. Although both have undergone changes in the course of history, the one rests on the foundation Wesley laid, while the other is the expansion of the Asbury model. Asbury provided America first with the concurrent conference plan whereby one annual conference was held in two or three sessions, the last session of which took place in Baltimore and where the final vote on issues of polity and discipline was taken. Earlier sessions would be held in other places such as South Carolina and Virginia, and at these sessions preachers for circuits in these regions were appointed. The concurrent conference plan was abandoned in 1787. The General Conference was instituted in 1792. It was an assembly of all the travelling preachers in full connection. In 1808 it was transferred into a delegated body with representatives of the various regions of the church. Each section had its own annual conference where appointments were made. Asbury's organizational mind guided the process whereby this new structure was formed.³⁰

Under him, also, the office of presiding elder was devised whereby collections of circuits into districts were provided with close and constant supervision, and the travelling preachers found a pastor in the elder who supervised their work.

Bishop Coke's wings were clipped at the conference of 1787, so that Asbury stood alone as the episcopal leader of American Methodism until the opening of the nineteenth century. Even when Whatcoat was elected bishop and later when McKendree was elected to that office as the first native American to become bishop, Asbury still directed the affairs of the church, and these men were no more than his assistants, as he and Rankin had been Wesley's in colonial days before the Revolutionary War.



30. *The History of American Methodism*. N. Y.—Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964. Vol. I, 423–440.

Practically everything we know today of our Methodist connec-tional system is derivative of Asbury. In fact, this Administrative Council that is being discussed as a possibility in the Structure Com-mittee is not new. Asbury devised one himself to help him govern the church, but it was too small and autocratic to suit the brethren and he was forced to abandon it as unworkable and accept the supremacy of the larger General Conference.³¹

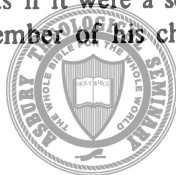
The appointive system was his greatest contribution to church government. Like any other bishop, he had a rough time with it, but its efficiency and its basic fairness guaranteed its survival and has made it, even now, the most effective arrangement for ministerial deployment that has yet been devised.

He wrote as follows to the conference when it was debating the merits and demerits of the appointive system. He excused himself from the session over which Bishop Coke presided.

"I am happy in the consideration that I never stationed a preacher through enmity, or as a punishment. I have acted to the glory of God, the good of the people, and to pro-mote the usefulness of the preachers. Are you sure, that, if you please yourselves, the people will be as fully satisfied? They often say, 'Let us have such a preacher;' and sometimes, 'We will not have such a preacher.' Perhaps I must say, 'his appeal forced him upon you.' I am one—ye are many. I am as willing to serve you as ever. I want not to sit in any man's way."³²

The preachers saw the force of the Bishop's reasoning. They were con-vinced that he could place them better than they could place them-selves. They voted overwhelmingly to leave the appointive power in the Bishop's hands. That is where it has remained from that day to this. More than anything else this has been the genius of American Methodism, and also the chief temporal reason for its amazing adapta-bility and remarkable success.

To be sure, Asbury was a rigid disciplinarian. He organized a church. Yet he treated it as if it were a society or a sect. He did not want just anybody as a member of his church. "It is manifestly our



31. Tipple, *op. cit.*, p. 255.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 259–260.

duty to fence in our society, and to preserve it from intruders," he wrote. "Otherwise we should soon become a desolate waste."³³ "We will have a holy people, or none."³⁴ Once when he was constantly interrupted in sermon by the frequent coming of people who were late, he frankly told them that he would rather they would stay at home than come in such an irregular manner.³⁵

But this "sect complex" was a hang-over from the early days—one of Asbury's eccentricities. It heightened interest in him; it did not detract from him. It was not strong enough to keep Methodism from being a church. Rather it was outweighed by his discernment of the importance of the episcopacy, which put Methodism in the main stream of Catholic Christianity and which makes it even now a bridge spanning the chasm between the Protestant and Roman and Orthodox lands.

Judging Asbury by the remarks in his journal on the Revolutionary War and American Independence, he would not qualify as having been fervently patriotic. This is all he said about the separation from England: "I heard the news that peace was confirmed between England and America. I had various exercises of mind on the occasion; it may cause great changes to take place among us, some for the better, and some for the worse. It may make against the work of God, our preachers will be far more likely to settle in the world; and our people, by getting into trade and acquiring wealth, may drink into its spirit."³⁶

Nevertheless he proved to be one of our greatest patriots. He served his country best by making so many of her citizens good. He set an altar to God in every major city and lighted fires to God's glory in the hills and in the valleys of rural America. Because of his travelling and preaching over the whole country, he was known to more people by sight than any other person in America during his day.

Perhaps he, rather than any statesman or politician, contributed most to the new nation, for what he gave to our people moth and rust could not corrupt and thieves could not steal from them. He gave them God; and when they knew what they had from him, they realized it was enough.

Delivered at The Francis Asbury Convocation, Wilmore, Kentucky, on October 28, 1971.



33. *Discipline*, 1798, p. 154.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

35. *Journal*, November 24, 1776, Vol. I, 205.

36. *Journal*, April 5, 1783, Vol. I, 440.

“THE MAGNIFICENT PURPOSE”

Bishop Kenneth W. Copeland

Read Philippians 1:12–30

In a world where THEOLOGY must catch up with TECHNOLOGY and become its master, and at a time in human history when SURVIVAL makes sense only in terms of SALVATION, we are taking time to look at the life of a man who recognized God's Moment when it came, who knew self-discipline as few have ever known it, who in early life—and throughout all of life—made the Saviorhood and Lordship of Christ the non-negotiable foundation and fact of his life, who as a very young man heard God's call, “Whom shall I send to America, and who will go for us?” and responded, “Here am I, Lord. Send me.” On these premises he came to this young nation and literally covered it with the Gospel, and left a Methodist Church committed to that Gospel for its own world.

The life of Francis Asbury is fascinating. We owe much to his biographers, without whose tireless work we would be much the poorer. However, I am most fascinated by the magnificent purpose of his coming to America on the one hand, and the obvious outcroppings of numberless evidences of man's cry for renewal in Christ and the thrilling relevance of the Asburian emphases to our day and need on the other hand. We labor under no illusions of Asbury's infallibility—nor ours. We will not allow ourselves to be enslaved by methods that worked in his day but obviously cannot work in ours. We will not be disturbed about his pattern of celibacy for himself nor his requirement in like manner for his preachers.

What does fascinate me is his announced purpose for his coming to America. On September 4, 1771, he set sail for America. On



September 12, 1771, he wrote in his journal, on board ship—"Whither am I going? To the New World. What to do? To gain honour? No, if I know my own heart. To get money? No: *I am going to live to God.*" We will seek to examine that *purpose* in its depth and find for our day the changeless character of the mission and the missionary which, hopefully, will so enflame our spirits, strengthen our wills, and empower our dedication that the result will be a renewal of the Christian and the Church in the 70's unprecedented in our history. "AND TO BRING OTHERS SO TO DO." Asbury spent a long life doing precisely this. He would not knowingly waver from this purpose! It is in this *MAGNIFICENT PURPOSE*, and in man's present hunger for true renewal that I find both *HOPE* and *COMMITMENT*. What, for our day, are the reflections and hope in this purpose?

First of all, IT IS *CHRIST-CENTERED*. Asbury stood in the noble line of true Apostolic Succession when he joined Paul in affirming: "For to me life is Christ." Dr. James S. Stewart, that brilliant and dedicated Scottish preacher, has reminded us that, "What the apostles preached was neither a philosophy of life nor a theory of redemption. THEY PREACHED EVENTS. They anchored their Gospel in history They wasted no time exhorting their hearers with moral homilies, or cajoling them with novel ideologies, or trying to build a Church on the shifting foundations of a man-centered constitution. They confronted them with something which had been done and done by God for ever—one mighty act, decisive, final and complete." We call it "The Christ Event."

"On Christ, the solid rock I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand."

The greatest news that greeted grieving disciples after the resurrection of Jesus were the words: "Jesus Christ is alive!" This is still the greatest news. More than that, HE IS LORD OF LIFE. He is both the LIVING SAVIOR And the LIVING LORD! He forgives our sins, through the power of His living Spirit He cleanses us from within. He also reigns in our daily lives, if we are His followers indeed. He is King, now. We are not sent out into the world to "make Christ King." This would be sheer presumption, when God has already made Him King and given Him the Name which is above every name. We do not go out in Mission with the intent of helping Christ to become King. We go out in Mission because He IS King already, *and the King has sent us out!* We are not to conduct a world-wide propaganda campaign for Christ's enthronement. We go out with the Glad Good News that unto

everyone of us “is born a Savior,” and that Savior is Lord of History, Lord of Life, and Lord of Death.

Whatever Renewal the Church will know in our day—and I firmly believe the Church is IN renewal at this moment—MUST be—and indeed WILL be—Christ-centered. Whenever the Church at any point in History has had an experience to share it has been when the Church has recognized anew the Saviorhood and Lordship of Christ.

“His Kingdom cannot fail;
He rules o’er earth and heaven;
The keys of death and hell
Are to our Jesus given.”

Furthermore, renewal will come—or REVIVAL, if you prefer that word—whenever we who profess to know Christ personally desire to share this experience with others. If we have met the Lord in the secret places of our own souls; if we have the experience Charles Wesley tried so hard to describe when he sang out:

“O Thou who camest from above
The pure celestial fire to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart;”

If we believe we are “heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ,” we can not rest until that living experience has become the experience of all mankind. Dr. James S. Stewart again speaks to us with incisive conviction: “Interest in the world crusade of Christianity thus stands in direct ratio to the vitality of personal religion.”

Hear again the words of Paul as he spoke to the Athenians, as the New English Bible renders that short, but powerful sermon: “Men of Athens, I see that in everything that concerns religion you are uncommonly scrupulous. For as I was going round looking at the objects of your worship, I noticed among other things an altar bearing the inscription “To an Unknown God.” What you worship *BUT DO NOT KNOW*—this is what I now proclaim.”

There is absolutely no doubt about it. The Methodist Revival was Christ-centered. It MUST be so today. I believe it WILL be so today. I believe it is now so in many places around the world.

This “magnificent Purpose” of Asbury’s was not only Christ-centered. It was, without doubt, PERSON DIRECTED. “I am going to live to God, AND TO BRING OTHERS SO TO DO.” Let no one think that I am here advocating a “private pietism: which leaves untouched the great social problems which threaten to devastate our

world before we know what is happening. In fact, Methodism has never left this facet of the faith out of its belief or practice. From the days of Wesley to our own day, Methodism has believed strongly that the Gospel must be both proclaimed and demonstrated; it must be spoken to the heart of man and to his social consciousness as well.

This will require sincere personal repentance. I use the word "personal" again, not to separate it from social application, but actually to open the only door possible to social renewal through persons as individuals or in communities.

Dr. Douglas J. Hall, in an article in *Religion and Life* entitled, "The Theology of Hope in an Officially Optimistic Society," has said that technological progress is outrunning theological and moral progress, and quotes Martin Buber who said: "Technology has become leaderless, the unlimited Mastery of the Means that no longer have to answer to any ends." Then Hall adds his own comment: "The threat to the future is not the wrong use of machinery but the absence of criteria for distinguishing Right and Wrong uses."

In fact, it is precisely because Methodism makes its message person-directed that it then has social relevance. There are NO social problems or issues or opportunities except as these can be seen in and through persons. Hunger and illness and illiteracy are not "issues." They are words we use to describe HUMAN agony and HUMAN need and HUMAN hope. It is not that human problems make necessary social concerns. On the contrary, it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, directed to persons for whom Christ died, that makes necessary a Christian social concern for all the sons and daughters of earth.

We may argue with Asbury's method, as many of his contemporaries did with sometimes abrasive and judgmental language, but we cannot argue with his motive. That motive was to reach persons everywhere. This was Christ's motive. We must remind ourselves that Jesus Christ did not only die for principles—*HE DIED FOR PERSONS*. He did not establish His Church on issues. He built it, and continues to build it, on the solid rock of His own Personhood as the Revelation of God among men, laid it on the shoulders of the apostles and prophets, and calls upon us limited creatures to carry our crosses in this noble procession as loyal subjects of the King.

This will require a renewed sense of personal responsibility. It is "my cross" I am to take up, not yours. Christ does not require that we carry "His cross for Him," but only that we take up "our cross" and follow Him.

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, in a recent syndicated article, affirmed: "When a man loses a sense of personal accountability, the three ultimate expressions of carnality, violence and insanity begin to clog the sewers of our nation . . . The way out is to be found through creative minorities: small groups of dedicated people who are resolved to reform themselves before reforming neighbors. The one argument that has not been used and which eventually always wins is holiness."

It is in the atmosphere of persons—and only in this context—that Love can become known. "God so loved the world of persons that He gave His only begotten Son" It is only through persons that His love can be transmitted. This is the one great lesson the Church has yet to learn in fuller measure before the Renewal we desire can really come in its fullness. This is the point at which our Blessed Lord brought two of the great Old Testament commandments together in one and called upon us to "love the Lord our God with *all* of the heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourself."

Recently a former prison warden who had witnessed 150 executions while a penologist in California told a college audience that LOVE, not punishment, is the main deterrent to crime. "A family that has love, direction, religion and discipline usually does not produce a criminal," Clifton Duffy told the students. "And a home where these essentials are lacking usually does," he added.

Yes, the Magnificent Purpose, the Renewal of the Church, the Revival for which we long and pray must be Person-Directed.

Finally, let me suggest this Magnificent Purpose was also SPIRIT-EMPOWERED! There should never be any mistake about that. And yet, this is one point at which contemporary ecclesiology so often becomes confused. We speak of "power struggles," and look to the Church to "empower" us. We speak of "empowering powerless nations" through economic and political means. However, as valuable as these references are, especially as they point to certain needs, we still miss the point. These are "authority centers" we are talking about. The Church does indeed "authorize" its ordained ministry to proclaim the Word, to perform the Sacraments of the Church, and to administer the work of the Church as Pastors. The Church does indeed "authorize" bishops to ordain deacons and elders, to appoint the ministers, to preside in the sessions of the conferences, and a few other duties which attempt to "oversee the temporal and spiritual" work of the Church. However, EMPOWER the ordained or the consecrated to the episcopal office THE CHURCH CANNOT. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will bear witness for me in Jerusalem, and all over Judea and Samaria, and away to the ends of the

earth." Acts 1:8. Renewal cannot possibly be without the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Dry bones CAN live only as the breath of God is breathed into them.

At this point it would seem important to suggest four words that can help us to see this great truth in clearer perspective. The first word is "Gift." The Holy Spirit is a Gift. He was in the very center of the Pentecostal experience when Peter proclaimed: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the *Gift* of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God may call. Acts 2:38-39. Note, please, the Holy Spirit is a GIFT. The command to "repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah," was not a pre-condition for "earning" the Holy Spirit. It was a command to be observed "for the forgiveness of your sins." THEN, "you will receive the GIFT of the Holy Spirit. For the PROMISE is to you" Let us see clearly, there are no conditions underlying GIFTS or PROMISES. I have another word to suggest in a moment, but at this point let me state again, THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A PROMISE AND A GIFT, and there are no pre-conditions underlying a promise of a gift. Even the command to "wait in Jerusalem" was not a precondition to the coming of Holy Spirit. Whatever follows, and there is much that follows, let us see the Holy Spirit as God's Gift of Himself. Jesus made it clear in His last discourse that the "*Father* would send the Comforter," and at no point in this discourse did Jesus lay down conditions to be met BEFORE the Father would send the Comforter. The Holy Spirit is God's *Gift* of Himself.

The second word which must fit into this mosaic is the word "Receive." In that upper room where the disciples were huddled in fear, the risen Christ came and said, "RECEIVE the Holy Spirit." Then He told them, "As the Father has sent me, even so send I you." Again, let us look at Peter's sermon: "Repent and be baptized . . . and you will RECEIVE the GIFT of the Holy Spirit." A gift is given without condition, *but before we can benefit by it we MUST RECEIVE IT*. "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man will open . . ." was the PROMISE to the lukewarm Church of Laodicea. It is still the PROMISE to the Church of the twentieth century. He stands at the door and knocks WITHOUT ANY PRECONDITIONS. But, it is still in my power to open the door, by His grace, and receive Him or leave it closed. God forbid that the Church should refuse to open that door.

The third word is FAITH. Of course we open the door to receive the Gift through FAITH. And even this faith is the gift of God. But it must be exercised by man. It is by FAITH that I open the door and by FAITH that I receive the Gift. It is by FAITH in Him who gives it, by FAITH in the purpose of the Gift, by FAITH in the GIFT Himself that I open the door. "Into my heart. Into my heart. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Come in today. Come in to stay. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus," my FAITH cries out in love. *AND THROUGH THIS FAITH HE COMES. YES, HE REALLY COMES, AS THE GIFT OF GOD.*

The fourth word is the word "Obedience." If by FAITH I open the door of my heart and life to RECEIVE the GIFT of the Holy Spirit PROMISED by the Father—if Christ is to be both my Savior from sin and my Lord of Life, then I WILL obey Him as He leads and empowers me. Obedience does not come as a pre-condition. How on earth could I obey Him without His help? Obedience comes after receiving the Gift. Then the FRUITS of the Spirit become real because the ROOTS are there.

We all seek this Renewal, do we not? Bernard Shaw gives a good illustration of the hope that still burns in the breast of so many people, in his play, "Too True to Be Good," written just before the Second World War. One of his characters says: "I stand midway between youth and age like a man who has missed his train; too late for the last and too early for the next. I have no Bible, no creed: the war has shot both out of my hands . . . I am ignorant: I have lost my nerve and am intimidated: all I know is that I must find the way of life, for myself or all of us, or we shall surely perish." That is the voice of a soul in despair but who is still groping in the darkness to find the light and the way. Could it be that Methodism in the 70's will rediscover the "Magnificent Purpose" which brought Francis Asbury to America two hundred years ago, and set him in the saddle to cover the land as no one else was willing to do, and will place this Purpose within the context of a space-age world with the content of the changeless Good News of God's Love for all mankind, and take this nation—and the world—for Christ. Could it be? I think it will be so.

This will require that we take Christ at His Word. It will require a giant leap of faith. John Keats in one of his letters uses a vivid, memorable expression about the literature of Shakespearean England. He speaks of "the indescribable gusto of the Elizabethan voice." Dr. James S. Stewart, that tremendous Scottish preacher, retired from New College, Edinburgh University, comments on this statement of

Keats and applies it to the Christian of the New Testament. He says: "They are possessed by an amazing consciousness of faith. You cannot fail to feel "the indescribable gusto" of the early Christian voice. It is important to notice their own explanation of this. They never attributed it to anything in themselves. You do not find them strutting about in ostentatious complacency, "We are able!" What you do find over and over again is "He is able."

"He is able to succor them that are tempted," Heb. 2:18.

"He is able to save them to the uttermost," Heb. 7:25.

"He is able to keep you from falling," Jude 24.

"He is able to subdue all things unto himself," Phil. 3:12.

"He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day," 2 Timothy 1:12.

"He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," Ephesians 3:20.

And He is: if we take Him at His Word, if we are committed in loving obedience to His leadership, if we are sincerely sensitive to the hungers and hopes of persons.

Dear God! What a chance!

Delivered at The Francis Asbury Convocation, Wilmore, Kentucky, on October 26, 1971.



SHARERS IN HOLINESS

James Earl Massey*

William Temple once wrote, "The most agreeable experiences in life are those which are marked by a coincidence of duty and pleasure."¹ He had that happiness as he looked back upon a lecture task fulfilled. I have that happiness as I meet with you in this experience of sharing and celebrating. The Francis Asbury Convocation Committee has done me honor in inviting my participation at such a responsible level. I express my thanks to the Committee, and I eagerly confess my pleasure to "dare" this duty and to honor that theological witness within which we find acknowledged agreement. I refer specifically to the Wesleyan witness concerning the experience of holiness.

We all know that this celebration is not to revel in the past, nor to engage in a mere intellectual enterprise, nor even to enjoy another historic speech situation. We are engaged here in nothing less than a reconsideration of the nature and results of our experience of God, "the Holy One." Just what is that experience? How does one posture himself for it? What is our posture because of this experience? What are its personal aspects—and what issues from the inward level of the experience to effect the outward and social aspects of our lives? Our holiness heritage speaks pointedly to these questions. I now move on to trace that pointing, and test it all anew against scriptural categories, definitions, and insights, strongly believing that the basic framework for interpreting our life and living must be forever biblical.

The phrasing of my subject has been influenced, as you have already discerned, by two highly-suggestive New Testament verses. The first of those verses is Hebrews 12:10, the context of which calls us to reconsider our trials as means of training for full life on God's terms,



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1. *Nature, Man and God* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1934), p. vii.

indeed to view our trials as agents of God's concern to shape us like himself. The analogy drawn by the writer between life under our earthly fathers and life under our heavenly Father is immediately clear. The final thrust of the comparison is razor-sharp in its theology. "For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness."

The second of those two verses that influenced my choice of subject is II Peter 1:4. Observe again the particularity of the wording and the distinctive theology of the writer. The connection of thought demands a reading of vss. 3-4 together.

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.

These two verses, culled from a much, much wider catena of texts dealing with the same concern, draw attention to one of the most pertinent and positive claims of the early Church: God has ordained that those who surrender to his love will be sharers of his likeness. Those who live life on God's terms will increasingly experience life on his level. Walking with God not only means a change in our *experience* but it also contributes to our very *being*. The texts are prophetic, admittedly technical, and unmistakably argue for a Christian mysticism. But their message is clearly put: a true knowledge of God gives the Christian believer a share in holiness. It is with this conspicuous fact of New Testament doctrine and experience that the Wesleyan holiness emphasis has concerned itself.

I.

Every serious student of Scripture knows that the central concept of its vast teaching about God is his holiness. This descriptive word about the nature of God occurs with such frequency and emphasis that it cannot be missed or overlooked. Holiness is the basic and key concept for understanding the witness of both testaments concerning God, both as to his nature and to his relations with men, things, and places. As regards his nature God is referred to, and speaks about himself, as "the Holy One" (Job 6:10; Isa. 10:17). Another description relates God to his people as "the holy One of Israel" (II Kgs. 19:22; Ps. 71:22; Isa. 1:4b; Jer. 51:5; Ezek. 39:7).

As the Holy One, God is distinctly "Other." He is separated, marked off in nature from that which is ordinary, common, human. The "Otherness" of God is so distinctive and unique, so absolute in its perfection and purity, so utterly peculiar to deity, that it occasions radical awe in man when God deigns by some mode to confront him. Both testaments supply us with multiplied instances when men recoiled upon confronting the "mysterium tremendum," as Rudolf Otto has aptly termed it.² But God is holy Person. This means that his "Otherness" does more than occasion a radical awe; it also occasions a radical attractiveness that invites. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the Testaments, the God and Father of Jesus the Christ is uniquely separate but not remote nor utterly removed. He is the God of awe, but he is also the God who appeals. He is the God who relates—to share himself and his life with men.

The holiness of God not only stirs a reaction to his presence. He invites a relationship with himself. God is not therefore unapproachable but is rather unavoidable. The clearest pictures of divine action show God's concern to relate with men and share himself with them. That is the dominating theme of the Scriptures.

Since all of this is so, it is important to ask in what way—and to what extent, does God share holiness with us. It is over this precise question that the theological camps are divided, some claiming more than God has made available, and others claiming less than God intended to bestow. There is a proper claim because there is the Scriptural truth about this whole matter. But it is necessary to ask the questions: does God only impute his holiness to us, or does he actually impart it to us who believe? This is more than a mere academic concern. It is a theme of prime importance to life. All Christendom commonly understands and affirms that God relates his life to our living in significant fashion. Our Wesleyan tradition makes claim upon his holiness in more than a figurative manner because holiness of life is for us more than a figure of speech. We affirm our faith that God has let us have a share in his holiness.



2. See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), pp. 12–24. Trans. by J. W. Harvey.

II.

On the Christological level of our witness, we affirm that *God has shown us his holiness* on our human level in his Son Jesus. The sonship of Jesus is real. It is also revelational. The character of his life was a manifestation of holiness in the flesh. This is in view in John 1:14 where the witnessing writer exclaims, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father." In Jesus Christ we have what Paul referred to as the visible "image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15); and the writer to the Hebrews used the same term as John in saying that Jesus the Son "reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature" (Heb. 1:3). The witness of the New Testament is unanimous in declaring that Jesus expresses the divine mode of being on our human level. In Jesus divine holiness has shown itself in *sarx*, and though he is fully human that holiness is undiminished. So Jesus could rightly claim, "And he who sees me sees him who sent me" (John 12:45), and he could truthfully declare, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). God has revealed his holiness on our level in the unique sonship of Jesus.

Jesus of Nazareth understood and declared himself to be the Son of God. He used the sonship designation in effect when in teaching his disciples he referred to God as Father; and it is common knowledge that he openly addressed God in prayer as "*Abbā*," as if it were his custom to be intimate with Him, and as if that way of addressing God possessed a deeper meaning and relationship.³ His use of that term of endeared relation is much too intense and intimate to allow me to believe only that "the decisive feature of the title [Son] is subordination."⁴ I rather believe, with the New Testament writers, that Jesus lived among us with a consciousness of unique relation with God. I believe that Jesus held, and now holds, with God a unique position, a unique relation, a unique life, a unique sonship. God was Father for

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3. See Gustaf Dalman, *The Words of Jesus* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), esp. pp. 280–287. Trans. by D. M. Kay. See also Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (SBT, Second Series, No. 6) (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1967), esp. pp. 44–57. Trans. by John Bowden.
 4. See the treatment of this view by Hans Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 127. Trans. by John Bowden.

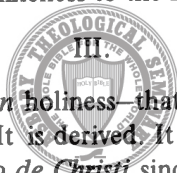
Jesus and in a manner we are not able completely to understand or explain. The New Testament witnesses to his life did not get side-tracked over metaphysical questions of his genesis or descent as divine Son; they rightly and wisely celebrated Jesus as saving person—giving honor to God the Father. What they saw in Jesus they began to share through his company. “And from his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace.” “No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (John 1:16, 18).

It has been necessary to repeat these statements about Jesus as the revealing Son because what we are to share of the holiness of God is related to what we see in Jesus. We see his sonship—and upon accepting him are granted sonship “in his name.” As John 1:12 puts it, “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.” As children of God we stand related to him, saved by grace and secure in his love. But there is more. As children of God we stand responsible to him—responsible to reflect his likeness and honor his name. We believers not only draw confidence from our Father’s care; we must dare full commitment to our Father’s will. Jesus himself shows us the model Son. Jesus himself is the “Beloved” for whose sake we have been admitted into the family of God. Paul expressed the matter in these words:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:3–6)

The Holy God stands behind it all, working through Jesus Christ in our interest and to his honor. Here Paul speaks again: “He [God] is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (I Cor. 1:30). Jesus is not only God’s model Son, he is our means for sonship at its best—which means a derived holy likeness to the Father.

Ours, then, is *Christian* holiness—that holiness made possible for us in the Spirit of Christ. It is derived. It is definite. It is distinctive. It is also holiness as *imitatio de Christi* since his person, life, teachings, actions, and spirit form the visible norm for our conduct and concerns.



Just as Jesus "imitated" God, doing as Son the deeds of his Father, (see John 5:19–20; 8:38–47), we "imitate" Jesus, following him, keeping his commandments, and living for his interests.

Jesus Christ himself conditions our share in holiness as the source of our Sanctification (I Cor. 1:30). Sanctification is that moral and ethical state that results from the commitment of our will to God's will as seen in Christ. Christian holiness involves our will in the same way that God's own original holiness necessarily involves his every act of will. Walther Eichrodt rightly states that God is known in terms of "holy personal will."⁵ Christians are known in terms of personal will anchored in the experience and commitment of holiness. Again Eichrodt, declares that, ". . . in any picture of the divine nature the moral will must be in the foreground dominating the whole."⁶

Christian holiness always involves the will. The gift of holiness is procured to the believer by the Spirit of Christ, but it develops in line with the believer's dedication and decisive openness toward God. What we have before us in Christian holiness is a qualitative life, a life that is both consequent and commitment.

1. Our share in holiness is, first of all, *individual*. It is personal. The whole self is called into the transaction with God. The will is addressed and engaged. Sanctification must have to do with the will because it is at the point of willing that personal life is realized. The will and its actions are the basic ingredients of history. History has to do with human action and intentional process, in the main. An act is not historical just because it happens, but because what is done relates to human decision.⁷ Personal history must be understood within such a context. The peculiar uniqueness of will is that it proclaims individuality and intentionality. Just as sin involves an intentional, willful act that contradicts divine will, holiness must involve intentional, willful

5. *Theology of the Old Testament*, Vol. One (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), p. 278. Trans. by J. A. Baker.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 279.

7. See, for example, John Macnuffay, *The Self As Agent* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 205, who comments: "What merely happens lies outside the historian's province. He is concerned with natural events and organic processes only in so far as they enter into the activities of human beings and play their part in setting the field for human decisions." See also H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928), esp. pp. 101–102.

obedience to that divine will. The self is always positioned between possibility and actuality, positioned there with some frame of reference by which to understand and relate to one or the other. Christian holiness is lived out when the will is so dispositioned that it relates to all matters in line with what is known about God's intentions regarding them. The bondage of the will to sinful choices is broken and overcome in conversion as a divine consequent; the freedom of the will in holiness is granted and guarded through relation with the Spirit in sanctification. We do not sin innocently but voluntarily. We are not made holy innocently but through decisive commitment voluntarily made in response to God's claim upon us. God calls the nature of our lives into account by addressing the will. God responds to the call of our need by addressing the will. God conforms the direction of our will only when we surrender it to the full claim of his intentions. This is always personal, individual, decisive.

2. Our share in holiness is also *identifiable*. New character traits are shaped under the influence of holiness. Christian character is an historical fact and an identifiable form of life. Meister Eckhart referred to this as "a habitual will"—by which he meant the will transformed into instinct, complete self-unity, oneness of self and self-interest. This is a kind of real adjustment to the scales provided by God, an adjustment aided by the Spirit who works within by both potency and immediateness.

Christlikeness is identifiable. The work of the Holy Spirit within us bears distinguished fruit. All of the listed fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) are identifiable in the walk and work of the Christian. The fruit develops as the Holy Spirit does his critical and creative work within us, focusing personality, and drawing tight the otherwise loose strings of personal life, holding them with the sure grip of God. It is that same Spirit who helps us to conform to the image of Christ. Irenaeus was referring to this special work of the Spirit when he said that the Holy Spirit "adjusts us to God."⁸ Other relations and influences in life tend to diminish the self, diffuse and dissipate the life. The Holy Spirit helps us to focus ourselves—in will and deed, to "cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness



8. Quoted by F. W. Dillistone, *The Holy Spirit in the Life of Today* (London: The Canterbury Press, 1946), p. 10.

perfect in the fear of God" (II Cor. 7:1). Such an experienced result is surely identifiable.

3. Our share in holiness is *intelligible*. The experience can be expressed in the form of definite doctrines and a set of convictions. Christian holiness can be discussed in terms of its features and aspects. We can isolate so much of what is involved, and interpret so much of what it means. It certainly involves a love of truth that enlightens and an abhorrence for falsity and sin. It involves separation from that which stimulates fleshly lusts. It involves a life separated from the will to transgress against God. This is intelligible. It is always good sense to live by a behavior pattern that honors God. It is always wisdom to live by a principle of selectivity that forbids evil and honors the good. Holiness has always meant certain limitations, but they are limitations in the interest of life at its best, the consecration of every power and potential to realize the manifest destiny of true and obedient sons of God. In the experience of holy living, a normative and intelligible loyalty to God is involved.

4. Our share in holiness is also *instrumental*. The sharing is progressive, fitting us for a destiny in the will of God. That sharing is also productive, fitting us to fulfill the works of love, and "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10b). That love, we remember, is a divine issue "because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5).

Sharing in holiness deepens the believer's sense of commitment to what is sacred. There are real differences to be regarded as we live, and a sense of commitment keeps us oriented to regard them. But sharing in holiness also orients us for a sense of caring. Just as there are sacred distinctives, there are social concerns. Wesley knew this, and he exercised a caring heart: attacking slavery, the plight of the poor, inhumane prison conditions, social and economic imbalances, among other evils, with direct, piquant, and vehement indignation.⁹ The Spirit of holiness is the spirit of righteousness and social reform. Francis Asbury knew this, and his antislavery sentiment was no secret matter. His work among black slaves as persons worthy of truth and love was so exemplary that the slaves honored him as a kind of Moses among



9. See esp. J. Wesley Brady, *England: Before and After Wesley: The Evangelical Revival and Social Reform* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1938).

them. I am pleased to report, as a black American, that one of the most notable Spirituals from our heritage was shaped in honor to Francis Asbury. The Spiritual was "Go Down Moses." Hindered in his efforts to emancipate the blacks, Asbury increasingly worked to evangelize them. An entry in his *Journal* on Monday, September 18, 1797, reads: "O, it was going down into the Egypt of South Carolina after these poor souls of Africans I have lost my health, if not my life in the end. The will of the Lord be done."¹⁰ Black historian Miles Mark Fisher has commented, "Negroes had no tangible way to tell him that they were thankful, but they promptly immortalized him in a great spiritual. He was their Moses."¹¹ "Surely, at that time, if not before," Fisher continues, "Negroes of Maryland were understood to sing the simplest form of their traditional song about their patron saint, saying:

Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egypt land,
Tell ole Pharaoh
Let my people go.¹²

Asbury's bi-racial ministry grew out of an indiscriminating heart. It was a heart in which God was instrumentally at work—by love. "My desire," Asbury once wrote, "is to live in love and peace with all men; to do them no harm, but all the good I can."¹³

John Wesley had written much earlier:

The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion,
but social; no holiness, but social holiness.
Faith working by love is the length and breadth
and depth and height of Christian perfection.¹⁴

It was a statement and reminder for all time.

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10. *The Journal of Francis Asbury* (London: Epworth Press, 1958), Vol. II, p. 132.
 11. Miles Mark Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs in the United States* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1953), p. 40. See also pp. 75–76, 178.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
 13. Asbury, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 181.
 14. *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A. M.* (London: John Mason, 1856), Vol. XIV, p. 305.

IV

It is Jesus who shows us the perfect life of holy sonship to God. It is the Holy Spirit who initiates us into that sonship life. That initiation is called *conversion*. Jesus spoke of this experience as being "born of the Spirit" (John 3:6), as being "born anew" or "born from above" (John 3:3, 7). Our human nature can originally reflect only our natural heritage of flesh, but by spiritual rebirth through conversion we can meaningfully intersect with the higher order of existence—and secure a share in it as new sons. Jesus must have been referring to this new life and nature and relationship when he urged men to "turn [*straphete*] and become like children" (Matt. 18:3).¹⁵ Jesus was concerned to have his hearers fully relate to God as obedient sons, honorable members of the family. The means was conversion, the divine begetting, a new origin "from above."

But that initiation is anticipatory. Conversion brings us into the new life, but sanctification grants us a fuller share in it. Conversion is the divine mode of our begetting; Sanctification is the divine mode of our maturity as sons. The experience of sanctification is both existential—that is, having to do with the problem of our human nature and the possible character of our lives—and it is eschatological—that is, having to do with our future; this being so, there are aspects within the experience that are conclusive and processive. It is conclusive in that our sonship has been "sealed" (Eph. 1:13) with the Holy Spirit, tagged and authenticated as God's very own through a share in holiness; yet it is processive in that the full realization and manifestation of the sonship state increasingly takes place.

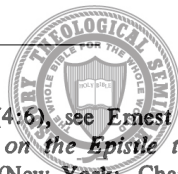
Sanctification enables us to fulfill two essential obligations: (1) experience in our character the holiness of God, and (2) bring honor to God through our dedicated living. It is possible to see this first

15. See Gerhard Barth, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," in Guenther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1963), where it is suggested, "Conversion, and thus also becoming a disciple, means 'becoming like a child' (18:3)." p. 121. See also p. 118. Trans. by Percy Scott. Compare Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), pp. 155–156, 178–184. Trans. by John Bowden.

obligation even in the teachings of Jesus. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). The correlation of "shining light" and "good deeds" expresses the notion of extraordinariness and recalls the splendor associated with the glory of God. God is always honored when we act true to our calling as sons. All that God does is worthy of himself because he is holy. The Christian son of God must see to it that his every deed be worthy of God. This is the meaning of a "Walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16, 25) and being "led by the Spirit" (Rom. 8:14). Sanctification makes this all possible—in disciplined and obedient joy. Paul expressed it in still another way in Galatians 4:6, saying, "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" Our sonship through conversion is the evident ground for a richer more complete experience of the Spirit. In that verse, Paul looks back from effect to cause, stating that the full share in the Spirit rests upon the prior fact that we are sons through his work. Paul further describes the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit of his Son," actively resident in our hearts—the very seat of our experienced life, stirring us to rightfully make the cry of Jesus before God our own cry: 'Abbā, "Father!"¹⁶ As Spirit-filled sons, as sons who have a share in holiness, we can publicly announce God as our Father. We can make that cry in witness or in prayer, and say it with overwhelming joy, with moral strength, with sure insight, with responsible emotion, and with definite assurance. It is with the possibility, necessity, excellence and availability of this experience that the Wesleyan emphasis on Christian holiness has been concerned.

As sharers in holiness we do not move on the basis of theory but rather by Scripture-informed faith. Ours is no independent holiness that smacks of regional, national, or denominational influence—some pattern of pious conformity and conduct peculiar to some group rationale. We have become sharers in "the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24). Our experience is a real fulfillment of "his precious and very great

16. On the Galatians text (4:6), see Ernest DeWitt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* ("International Critical Commentary") (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), pp. 221–223.



promises” and we have “become partakers of the divine nature” (II Pet. 1:4). Under the impact of the Holy Spirit’s immediacy and potency we are learning to love and labor on God’s terms. Under the impress of the Spirit’s leadership we are increasingly open to dare our necessary tasks in the world. And in the midst of it all, we are learning more and more about life with God. We are experiencing far more than we can adequately explain. So much continues to out-distance all formal lines of our understanding. But we do know that it is all because of “God at work in [us], both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

V.

Our celebration is not because we are “beside ourselves.” We rather celebrate because we have grounds for being “enthusiasts”—literally so: *God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.* God has placed his holiness at our disposal for life in this world and in the next! God has let us begin to apprehend him in his own holiness, while at the same time deepening and clarifying our own humanity. We are learning to live more and more out of God and less and less out of ourselves.

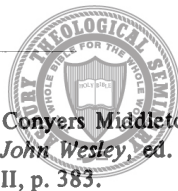
You have noticed my frequent use of “we” as I have been speaking about all this. My use is admittedly confessional. I speak honestly and without reluctance. I speak, like the writer of John 1:14, because I too have experienced the “glory.” It is a vast company of believers for whom I speak in witness, a company of men and women who have known the disciplines and delights and duties of holiness. It is a company filled with men and women who eagerly affirm, with Paul, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain” (I Cor. 15:10a); believers who can confess, with John, that “our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (I John 1:3b); believers who are assured, like Jude, that God “is able to keep [us] from falling and to present [us] without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing” (vs. 24). It was to such a company that John Wesley belonged, and he could ably trace out the source and meaning of his experience. Wesley knew “holiness and happiness” through divine promises fulfilled in his own sonship. Declared he, “I now am assured that these things are so: I experience them in my own breast. What Christianity (considered as a doctrine) promised is accomplished in my soul. And Christianity, considered as an inward principle, is the completion of all those promises. It is holiness and happiness, the

image of God impressed on a created spirit, a fountain of peace and love springing up into everlasting life.”¹⁷ Francis Asbury was of such a company. He testified at 31, “All my desire is for the Lord, and more of his divine nature impressed on my soul. I long to be lost and swallowed up in God.”¹⁸ Such a company takes divine sonship seriously. Such a company knows the deeper ways of God with men.

Soli Deo Gloria

Delivered at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky, on October 27, 1971.

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17. From his letter to Dr. Conyers Middleton, dated January 4, 1749. See *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. by John Telford (London: Epworth Press, 1931), Vol. II, p. 383.
18. *The Journal*, Vol. I, p. 178. The entry is dated Feb. 12, 1776.



HOW TO BECOME A BISHOP WHILE BEING TRULY RELIGIOUS

Timothy L. Smith*

All of the references below are to Francis Asbury, *Journal and Letters* (J. Manning Potts, Elmer T. Clark and Jacob S. Payton, eds.; 3 vols.; Nashville, 1958).

In December, 1783, a letter from John Wesley caught up with Francis Asbury in an obscure North Carolina settlement through which he was passing on his annual visitation of the Methodist societies in that primitive country. The letter appointed Asbury Wesley's "General Assistant" in the superintendency of the American churches. It also directed the Assistant not to accept into his fellowship any preacher from England who did not come with Wesley's recommendation and to receive none, however recommended, who would not be fully subject to Asbury and to the American Conference.¹ Thus ended almost twelve years of uncertain and strained relations between the two men. They had not seen each other since 1771, when Wesley had sent young Asbury, then only 26 years old, to help spread Methodism in America. The estrangement stemmed in part from prejudiced reports sent home soon after Asbury arrived, complaining of the latter's insistence that he and his fellow ministers should not settle in cities but itinerate, and misinterpreting Asbury's overly-zealous administration of Methodist discipline.²

Each year thereafter witnessed one or another kind of crisis, both in Asbury's personal ministry and in the Methodist fellowship. Each crisis was symptomatic of differing perceptions of means and ends,

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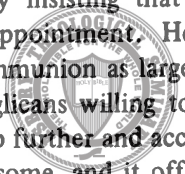
1. I, 450; III, 31-32.

2. I, 85-86. NOT TO BE USED WITHOUT COPYRIGHT PERMISSION
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both among the ministers and between the ministers and laymen gathered into local societies. The issue of discipline never disappeared, nor did that of evangelism or itineracy. They were overshadowed for a time by the political crisis of the American Revolution, in which Wesley's intemperate attack upon the rebelling colonists made the Patriot party suspect every Methodist minister, and particularly those who were recently from Britain, to be a Loyalist agent.

As the war drew to a close, the questions of ordinances and of organization became crucial. Both during and after the Revolution, Methodist preachers chafed under the desire of their converts to receive the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper, ordinances which preachers were strictly forbidden to administer who had not been ordained deacons or priests in the Church of England. Asbury, of course, and nearly all of his preachers in America were not ordained. Methodists usually took communion when they were able in Anglican churches and secured baptism for their infants there. When the war ended, however, the organizational crisis confronting the Anglicans, who had themselves long suffered from the refusal of the Church of England to appoint an American bishop and who soon would form a separate national denomination, affected Methodists as well. All these circumstances pushed the Methodist societies toward the establishment of a separate sect or denomination, confronting Asbury with another crisis.

Through his conduct in relation to each one of these complex challenges, Asbury proved himself the true leader of the Methodists in America. At last, in 1783, John Wesley recognized this fact and granted the younger man his fullest approbation. During the year following, the Founder sent Thomas Coke to America with instructions to organize a separate denomination, to ordain the ministers who were qualified, and to make Francis Asbury co-superintendent with Coke of the Methodist societies in the United States. The proposal required Asbury to reverse his long insistence upon the high-church Anglican position concerning ordination and the sacraments. He spent a month or so praying, thinking, and consulting with his brothers about the plan. He at last accepted it heartily as a formalization in ritual of what had, in fact, been the case for many years, only insisting that an election by his fellow ministers ratify Wesley's appointment. He and Coke, eager to draw away to the Methodist communion as large a group as possible of the company of American Anglicans willing to make the Methodist discipline their own, went a step further and accepted the title of "Bishop." This step was a scandal to some, and it offended the aged Wesley. But Asbury had long since learned to rely upon his own judgment of what



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seemed God's will and of what was good for American Methodists, even if his beloved mentor in England had not yet seen what needed to be done. By that time, moreover, Asbury knew that he had won not only Wesley's approbation but the confidence of his brethren. He had done so by simply being himself, a truly religious man.

What I have to offer in this study of how Asbury became a bishop is no set of secrets for ecclesiastical success. The point I make is much simpler, but, on that account, perhaps all the more valuable. Asbury's experience suggests that when a pastor is honestly dealing with his own religious problems and overcoming them by faith in Christ, and when he tries with equal honesty and openness to help others with their problems, the strength that flows between him and his people may become a stronger bond than ritual or organization or oratory can forge. A bishop, like a pastor, needs charisma. But charisma, understood in Christian terms, is neither put on, nor received as a miraculous gift. It grows out of an apostleship in which one is true to himself, open with his brothers and sisters, and honest to God. That, at least, is the moral I point, in advance of telling the tale, from Francis Asbury's emergence as the founding bishop of American Methodism.

In every case his conduct and inspiration as a Methodist preacher—what we might call his policy—was a consistent expression of his own inward quest fully to receive and completely to share with those around him the love of the one whom he believed was the Lord, Jesus Christ. Becoming a bishop was incidental to that quest. He could scarcely have realized, save in retrospect, that his peculiar combination of talents and opportunities for service would lead to such an outcome. That event was in fact one of the lesser fruits of his commitment of his life in its larger and truly religious purposes.

I shall try to make plain the bases of these conclusions by reference to four areas of Asbury's leadership, namely, doctrine, discipline, pastoral care, and the resolution of conflicts.

First, any careful reading of his journal makes clear that the continuous effort to improve his own understanding of his faith was the foundation of his effectiveness in preaching the doctrines of Christianity to others. Asbury read continuously from a wide range of Christian literature, and dipped occasionally into pagan or secular writings as well. No trip by land or sea found him without some difficult volume to master, and no time of release or confinement from heavy duties passed without his recording in his diary the substance of his reaction

to the many things he read.³ Most interesting to me is not simply the variety of the books, but the tenor of his response to them. He was obviously reading both devotionally and critically, searching frequently the writings of Calvinist or of non-Christian authors for insights about the truths of the gospel which he could apply to his own spiritual needs. At the same time, he evaluated them all by reference to a rigorous standard of what he believed to be Biblical truth.⁴ The consequence was that with Asbury, as with Wesley, devotional and doctrinal pursuits were united; experience and creed formed a consistent whole. "It is plain to me," he wrote on one occasion, that "the devil will let us read always, if we will not pray; but prayer is the sword of the preacher, the life of the Christian, the terror of hell, and the devil's plague."⁵

Little wonder, therefore, that those doctrines of the Christian faith which Asbury emphasized in his preaching were those which were central to personal religious experience: the incarnation, atonement and resurrection of the Lord, Jesus Christ; the promise to believers of the assurance of salvation, on the ground of their repentance and faith; the saints' inheritance of God's gift of perfect love; the centrality of witness in the Christian life; and the hope of eternal life which he believed was the basis not only of the faith of the church but of the trust and love of each child of God.⁶

Now, to be sure, Asbury, like all eighteenth-century ministers, preached a full range of Christian doctrines; the sketches of his many sermons make this point clear. Unlike the caricature historians have drawn of the circuit-rider who repeated his two or three familiar discourses at each location across a wide area and then moved on to another circuit, Asbury might preach on as many as twelve or fifteen different texts in a single fortnight, even after he had enjoyed great "liberty," as he put it, in preaching on one and might have been, on that account, prompted to repeat that sermon at the next stop.⁷ Clearly, his preaching was intended for his own edification as well as that of his hearers; as all good preaching should, it grew out of his own devotional life.

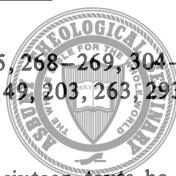
3. I, 5, 192-198, 263-265, 268-269, 304-305.

4. I, 121, 127, 141, 148-149, 203, 265, 293.

5. I, 314; cf. p. 126.

6. I, 253, 293, 356.

7. See, for example, the sixteen texts he used between May 28 and June 10, 1780, recorded in I, 353-356, and cf. pp. 376-377.



The doctrines having to do with the salvation of persons, then, became and remained central in Methodist preaching for generations to come. This fact has given rise to the remarkable judgment, enforced by incantation rather more than by evidence, that American Protestantism generally, especially in its Methodist and Baptist forms, had no theological substance, being concerned principally with the salvation of sinners. This judgment stems in fact from the theological bias of European religious thought, which evaluates the strength of a theology according to its originality in dealing with either Calvinistic or rationalistic presuppositions. The New Testament, however, like Asbury's sermons, makes the primary meaning of the gospel to be "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth."

At one point, moreover, I think that Asbury, as compared with Wesley and his colleagues in England, made a genuine advance in the art of teaching the gospel. He learned to preach short sermons, without a manuscript or extensive notes; and he judged each attempt not only by the clarity with which he had been able to enforce a particular teaching but by what he described as the degree of "liberty" he felt when doing so. One inclined to jump to the conclusion that he meant by "liberty" a merely emotional freedom in rhetoric would do well to consider the intensity of Asbury's resistance to emotionalism and to all forms of what he and Wesley called enthusiasm. What Asbury meant by the word was, rather, the degree to which the clear conviction of the ultimate significance of what he was preaching flowed between speaker and hearers, breaking up resistance to it. When he wrote, as he often did, that "there was a great melting" while he preached, he meant simply that he sensed minds and hearts were opened to accept the truth.⁸

Viewed without preconceptions grounded in either rhetoric or theology, I suppose one would say that the effectiveness of his preaching lay in the fact that it echoed his praying. At the center of both was Asbury's desire to know and to share the love of Jesus. He uttered judgments tenderly and made rebuke an act of love. The heart of every sermon was the promise that a God of infinite mercy stood ready to pardon and to cleanse all sin. Asbury had little patience with what he called the "furious" spirit in which Thomas Rankin sought to enforce the law of the Lord. His own personal salvation, his diary makes plain, was to him



8. See especially I, 353-354, 376-377, and *passim*.

each day the wondrous gift of God's loving grace, of which he felt utterly unworthy; what he proclaimed to lost and sinning men was the same loving and forgiving grace. Than such, it seems to me, there is no higher, no more subtle, no more profound Christian doctrine.⁹

Turning now to discipline, Asbury regarded the willingness of Methodist preachers to enforce rigorously the rules of Methodism as a test of the soundness of their faith. This attitude may appear on first reading as a manifestation merely of organizational loyalty. It proves on closer inspection, however, to have reflected his passion for communal discipline. That passion, in turn, stemmed from Asbury's deep honesty about his own need for that continual correction from Scripture and Holy Spirit and church fellowship which he believed necessary to make him a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Such discipline, either personal or communal, was no work for weaklings; Asbury's strength in public tests stemmed from his rigor in self-examination. "It is for holiness my spirit mourns," he wrote some months after his arrival in America; "I want to walk constantly before God without reproof . . . God hath sent me to this country. All I seek is to be more spiritual, and given up entirely to God—to be all devoted to Him whom I love."¹⁰ Out of this fountain sprang his firmness with others.¹¹ On an early visit to Philadelphia in April, 1772, he recorded that he "preached to the people with some sharpness," and then in the evening "kept at the door, met the society, and read Mr. Wesley's epistle to them." Keeping at the door meant, of course, forbidding participation in the society of those who did not seem truly converted or who were unwilling to accept Methodist discipline. Later in the week, Asbury wrote that he had "heard that many were offended at my shutting them out of society meeting, as they had been greatly indulged before. But this does not trouble me. While I stay, the rules must be attended to; . . . I cannot suffer myself to be guided by half-hearted Methodists." An elderly member of the Society of Friends thereupon told him that "the opinion of the people was much changed, within a few days, about Methodism, and that the Quakers and other dissenters had laxed *their discipline*; that none but the Roman Catholics kept it

9. I, 141, 245–246.

10. I, 8,

11. For an example see I, 145–146.



up with strictness." But, Asbury confided to his journal, "these things do not move me."¹²

That Asbury could also accept the discipline of others was continuously clear during these early days. When Rankin, who also bore the title of Wesley's Assistant in America, prevented his going back to the Baltimore circuit, where Asbury's work was beginning to bear fruit and where many friends were pleading for him to come, the future bishop found it grievous, but was sure that "all things shall work together for good to them that love God." When Rankin spoke kindly to him the next day, he expressed the hope that "all things will give place to love." He remained in Philadelphia, sharing the pulpit with Rankin, chafing but obeying. On the Lord's day, December 18, 1774, he wrote, "My soul was happy while preaching in the morning. Mr. Stringer gave us an old piece at church; and Mr. Rankin was very furious in the evening." Nevertheless, the following Wednesday, deep in the reading of Neal's *History of the Puritans*, he wrote, "The Lord keeps me from all impure desire, and makes me to abound with divine peace. In prayer meeting this evening, all present were greatly blessed."¹³ Again and again, it is clear that the ground of Asbury's administration of discipline in the Methodist community as well as his submission to it was his own private commitment to the will of God, and his quest for perfect love.

Since that commitment and that quest transcended allegiance to any man, they may also have reflected or contributed to his sense of alienation. At a quarterly meeting with his fellow ministers in Maryland in 1775, Asbury was depressed by the realization that, as he put it, "my hand appears still to be against every man." The strength of his discipline, which had helped to produce these feelings, stemmed not from physical vigor, for he had been sorely ill, but from a determination, as he put it, "that my few remaining days may be spent to His glory."¹⁴ When Methodism was growing rapidly in Baltimore, he spoke plainly one Monday evening, he tells us, "on the nature of our society," and "the necessity of discipline," a subject which was "not pleasing to

12. I, 28; cf. pp. 96, 127, 159-161.

13. I, 140-141.

14. I, 96.



some.” Nevertheless, he wrote, “I desire to know no man after the flesh. My soul is in peace.”¹⁵

The singular strength of Methodist organization across the ensuing decades, in frontier settlements as well as in the great cities, seems to have stemmed from the personal strength which Asbury and his ministerial and lay associates displayed by insisting that the covenant with Christ required radical inward as well as outward discipline. A reasonable conjecture is that such men were spared from remorse at those who were not willing to submit to the rules, by their keen awareness of how dangerous it had been to their own spiritual lives to regard temptation lightly or to dally with their vocation to holiness. Not organizational loyalty, but the hope of heaven and their earthly experience of the interdependence of holiness and love formed the spiritual basis of their passion for discipline and revealed their attachment to the idea of Christian community.

Consider, now, the evidences of that attachment in Asbury’s work as pastor. If Asbury’s doctrinal insights and concern for obedience to Methodist rules grew out of his personal religious experience, his spiritual identification with the people whom he served was a principal factor in his emergence as bishop. That identification, in turn, stemmed from his efforts to follow closely in the footsteps of Jesus, whom he thought to be the great Shepherd. Touring Virginia in the fall of 1780, Asbury found himself speaking “with great liberty” one day when several preachers were present. “They shook whilst I showed the call to the ministry,” he wrote,

how they ought to evidence it, by having the same end in view our Lord had; ‘to preach the Gospel to the poor; to bind up the broken-hearted, and to set at liberty them that are bound;’ to imitate the prophetic and priestly office of Christ,—thus to set up Christ among the people, or to conclude they had not the call.¹⁶

Such a pastoral ideal helped Asbury to lay aside very early his initial prejudice against ministering in cities. In the late fall of 1773, stationed in Baltimore, he found himself preaching every day, first in the town and then at Fells Point where the docks were located, to



15. I, 90.

16. I, 16.

great crowds of people. "Many are under some awakenings here," he wrote, "and they are very kind and affectionate to me."¹⁷ He helped the congregations in both places erect buildings, visited and preached from house to house, and led the way in ministry to the poor, the imprisoned, and the drunken. Lying down to sleep one Friday night he found himself burdened by his concern for the inhabitants of Baltimore. "I am pressed under them as a cart full of sheaves," he wrote, "and would rather be employed in the most servile offices than preach to them, if it were not from a sense of duty to God . . ."¹⁸ Though his love for Baltimore always remained strong and he returned there happily whenever assigned,¹⁹ what he had actually learned in his first two years in America, in brief pastorates in New York City, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, was that a country boy like himself could build through an urban ministry the base from which to mount an invasion of the countryside nearby, preaching weekdays in small settlements or private homes and establishing a network of Methodist classes all around a major city. This was the plan Asbury followed thereafter. In the summer of 1775, when stationed at Norfolk, Virginia, he shuttled back and forth by ferry between Norfolk and Portsmouth on Sundays. On weekdays he sometimes went "to the farthestmost part of Portsmouth parish, through such a swamp as I never saw before, and partook of a blessing with the people," some of whom were "of a simple heart."²⁰ He visited regularly several small societies, numbering sometimes scarcely a dozen members and meeting at some planter's home in the woods. We can understand why his Sunday congregations in Norfolk soon came to consist "of many people from the country as well as the towns."²¹

When stationed later that year at Philadelphia, Asbury combined a close pastoral ministry to the city congregation with frequent trips into New Jersey. He encouraged the preachers in the sizeable towns to erect houses of worship, conducted class meetings and love feasts, the latter being services in which those present shared their private spiritual experiences, and meanwhile cultivated day by day his own inner

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17. I, 98.
 18. I, 107.
 19. I, 140, 150–155.
 20. I, 157.
 21. I, 159.



devotion to Christ. In Philadelphia, as in Baltimore, he continued to preach often in private dwellings even after church buildings were erected, a habit no doubt enforced by his rural experience, where he saw the value of preaching in the intimate surroundings of a home.²² In 1788, Asbury wrote Ezekiel Cooper, pastor in Baltimore, a brief instruction on the urban pastorate which reveals how mistaken is the myth that the bishop always remained at heart a frontier circuit rider. He told Cooper to call in every home of his society once each two weeks, "for no other purpose than to speak to each in the family about their souls." He counseled him to preach somewhere every other night and to remember that "sermons ought to be short and pointed in town" and that they should "press the people to conviction, repentance, faith and holiness." He continued, "I am sure that the whole method of preaching will be changed as we come near the golden age. So shall we speak not so much by system but by life and application in the heart, little illustration and great fervency in the spark of life."²³

Asbury's pastoral concern was especially apparent in his insistence upon constantly preaching to poor people and to Negroes and prisoners wherever he found them. On his first appointment for a three-month period in Philadelphia, in the spring of 1772, he wasted no time in going to preach to the "poor mortals in the Bettering-house."²⁴ Whenever stationed in New York City he went frequently to the cluster of cottages beside Beekman's Swamp, where lived the poor tannery workers.²⁵ He preached to Negroes everywhere, and in joint meetings with white people most of the time.²⁶ But he met black people separately also, particularly in Baltimore. There, he wrote, some of their "unhappy masters forbade their coming for religious instruction. "How will the sons of oppression answer for their conduct," he asked, when the great "Proprietor of all shall call them to an account?"²⁷ His journal shows a remarkable consistency of concern to convert and enroll black people in Methodist societies; and he opposed slavery always,

22. I, 184-187.

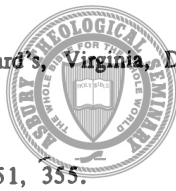
23. Francis Asbury, Woolard's, Virginia, December 24, 1788, to Ezekiel Cooper, III, 66.

24. I, 25.

25. I, 134.

26. I, 51, 56-57, 331, 351, 355.

27. I, 190; cf. pp. 200, 323.



both before, during, and after the Revolution. On Maryland's Eastern Shore in 1784, he found a black man who was a Methodist under sentence of death for thefts committed before his conversion. Though "much given up" to his fate, the man was reprieved under the gallows, while "a merchant who cursed the Negro for praying" dropped dead on the spot. "I pity the poor slaves," Asbury added; "Oh that God would look down in mercy, and take their cause in hand."²⁸

It is clear also, however, that the young preacher was equally interested in the conversion of wealthy and socially eminent persons whom he could bring to Christian faith and discipline. The summer of 1776 found him ill. He determined to go to Berkeley Springs, a resort in Morgan County, Virginia, two days journey from Baltimore, to recover his health. Whether the healing powers of the springs had a fair test in his case is questionable. The first Sunday of his six-week stay he preached out of doors so loudly that he hurt himself, in his "desire that the people who were in their houses might hear." The following Tuesday he "preached again by the side of the hill, near the bath;" and the word, he tells us, "had a melting influence on some of the congregation." By Wednesday he sensed "a manifest check to the overflowing tide of immorality" among the crowds of wealthy vacationers. By the end of the week he had established a daily schedule for his holiday: "to read about a hundred pages a day; usually to pray in public five times a day; to preach in the open areas every other day; and to lecture in prayer meeting every evening. And if it were in my power," he added, "I would do a thousand times as much for such a gracious and blessed Master. But in the midst of all my little employments, I feel myself as nothing, and Christ to me is all in all."²⁹

Nor did this balancing of concern for the poor and the wealthy diminish after Asbury had been elected Bishop. In 1786 his long journey on horseback through the wilds of backwoods Carolina, passing over flooded creeks, occasionally missing appointments from wrong turns taken amidst driving rain, and usually ill himself, revealed the passion of a man driven by concern for poor men settled in the wilderness.³⁰ He returned by way of Alexandria, Virginia, where he

28. I, 469.

29. I, 195; see generally, 191-197.

30. I, 506-509.



preached Sunday morning in the courthouse and in the evening at the Presbyterian Church and laid plans for a Methodist meeting house. After a brief visit to Baltimore he headed into Western Maryland and Virginia, one foot swollen and feverish, staying in uncomfortable lodgings, sometimes rising to preach when “almost ready to drop for want of sleep.”³¹ Arriving at Friends’ Cove in Western Maryland, he wrote, “I have been greatly tempted to impatience and discontent. The roads are bad; my horse’s hind feet without shoes; and but little to eat. To this I may add that the lodgings are unclean and uncomfortable.” Nevertheless, he preached the next day, Sunday, and “had sweet communion with God in the woods,” he tells us. “My soul hath rest in Lord.” He stopped a few days later at the Springs in Bath, Virginia, for his annual “vacation,” which he spent in reading and preaching to the wealthy planters gathered there while trying to find “the healing efficacy of the waters” for himself. Of the visit he wrote, “more than ordinary in prayer, and spoke in public every other night.”³²

Asbury’s pastoral care for children affords another perspective upon his effort to follow the example of Jesus. As early as September, 1772, he held a meeting in New York City “for the better ordering of the spiritual and temporal affairs of the society.” Of the sixteen questions he raised dealing with general matters of discipline and organization, one of the several which got an affirmative answer was “Can the preacher meet the children?”³³ In the midst of the revolutionary war while still free to travel over his Delaware circuit, he preached persistently on “the education of children, and family duties.”³⁴ In November, 1780, free again after a long period of danger to travel through Virginia and Delaware and help the ministers in charge of the multiplying circuits, he came back to his favorite residence, Dover, and proposed meeting the children. “I appointed a place for them to sit, and desired the parents to send a note with each, letting me know the temper, and those vices to which the child might be most subject.” Then, without any indication of a change in subject, he added to his diary for that day, “I love to spend a few minutes every hour in prayer. I see

31. I, 510–516, *passim*.

32. I, 516–518.

33. I, 42; cf. p. 47.

34. I, 293.



great need of living near to God—the people are so affectionate. Lord, humble me!” He was reading Wesley’s *Journal* at the time, preaching frequently on Christian perfection, and conferring constantly with his fellow ministers concerning the danger of a separation of the Methodists in Virginia.³⁵

Indeed, this same commitment to pastoral care, on the model he thought Jesus provided, eventually made Asbury, the high-church Anglican and lover of all things British, an American patriot. The event was crucial to his nomination and election as bishop.

The first intimations of the approach of the revolt of the colonies from England drew from Asbury a sharp reaction against the involvement of preachers in politics. In the fall of 1774 he refused even to think about the consequences of the British attack on Boston. “Alas,” he wrote, “what a small matter may interrupt our communion with God; even draw away our affections from him.”³⁶ But the matter would not stay small. In Baltimore in March, 1775, his preaching on the glory of God fell on deaf ears, he thought, because “they were training the militia” and “the town seemed all in confusion.”³⁷ A few Sundays later he heard “alarming military accounts from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia,” but comforted himself with the hope that the Lord would overrule “and make all these things subservient to the spiritual welfare of his Church.” Nevertheless, back in town Tuesday night after a visit to the country, he “found the people all inflamed with a martial spirit.”³⁸ Throughout the following years Asbury was always unhappy when confined, as he wrote one evening, “to the company of men who were destitute of religion, and full of sin and politics.”³⁹

Nevertheless, the crucial decision to stay in America rather than to join the other British preachers in plans to return to England was for him a pastoral duty before which he did not hesitate. In early August, 1775, he received at Norfolk a letter from Thomas Rankin announcing that the latter and two other preachers had concluded it would be best

35. I, 386–388.

36. I, 138; cf. p. 130.

37. I, 152.

38. I, 155; for comparable events in Norfolk, Virginia, later the same year, see pp. 164, 171, 176.

39. I, 156.



to return to England. "But I can by no means agree to leave a field for gathering souls to Christ as we have in America," Asbury confided to his journal.

It would be an eternal dishonour to the Methodists, that we should all leave three thousand souls, who desire to commit themselves to our care; neither is it the part of a good shepherd to leave his flock in time of danger: therefore, I am determined by the grace of God, not to leave them, let the consequence be what it may.⁴⁰

The consequences were, indeed, formidable. In March, 1776, he came to Philadelphia, having ridden two thousand miles since his last visit there, for a parting conversation with Thomas Rankin. Asbury's own decision had been complicated by publication in America of John Wesley's denunciation of the rebels. Although "an affectionate letter from Mr. Wesley" awaited him there, Asbury wrote he was "truly sorry that the venerable man ever dipped into the politics of America. My desire is to live in love and peace with all men; to do them no harm, but all the good I can." He thought it unreasonable for their critics "to censor the Methodists in America, on account of Mr. Wesley's political sentiments," since the Founder had simply revealed by his tract a "conscientious attachment to the government under which he lived." Had Wesley "been a subject of America," Asbury wrote, "he would have been as zealous an advocate of the American cause." In these words, Asbury perhaps unconsciously betrayed his own growing sense of being "a subject of America," though his subjection seemed to him primarily to his Lord and to the pastoral responsibility which he had assumed.⁴¹

Asbury spent a great deal of time the following year in Baltimore, endeavoring as much as possible in his pastorate to ignore the events of the Revolution.⁴² In March, 1777, a letter from one of his fellow ministers reminded Asbury that according to the rule adopted by the Methodist conference in England, "the time was drawing near for us to return." Asbury noted, however, that since Saint Paul's rule was "that our spiritual children should be in our hearts, to live and die with them,

40. I, 161–162.

41. I, 181.

42. I, 228–229.



... doubtless we should be willing to suffer affliction with them." Then he prayed, "May the Lord give me wisdom sufficient to direct me in this and every intricate case." In the following days Asbury found himself anxious "in respect to the times," and wrote: "My brethren are inclined to leave the continent, and I do not know that something may be propounded to me which would touch my conscience; but my determination is to trust in God, and be satisfied if the souls of my fellow men are saved."⁴³ Troubled lest his preaching in America seem to support acts of revolution and informed in September, 1777, that Thomas Rankin and one other minister had, in fact, at long last left the continent, Asbury wrote, "so we are left alone. But I leave myself in the hand of God; relying on His good providence to direct and protect us" ⁴⁴

Retreating from the excitements of Baltimore to Delaware, he concentrated in his pastoral work on dealing "plainly and honestly, though affectionately and tenderly" with his people, affirming that, "if we seek to please men, unless it is for their good to edification, we are not the servant of Christ."⁴⁵ He buried himself during this time also in Mr. Wesley's works, commenting that there was "a certain spirituality" in them which he could "find in no other human compositions A man who has any taste for true piety, can scarcely read a few pages in the writings of that great divine, without imbibing a greater relish for the pure and simple religion of Jesus Christ, which is therein so Scripturally and rationally explained and defended." On a Friday, the 13th of February, 1778, he wrote that he was "under some heaviness of mind. But it was no wonder: three thousand miles from home—my friends have left me—I am considered by some as an enemy of the country—every day liable to be seized by violence, and abused. However, all this is a trifle to suffer for Christ, and the salvation of souls. Lord, stand by me!"⁴⁶ A little later, back in Maryland, he wrote "surely God will stand by and deliver me! I have none other on whom I can depend. And He knows with what intention and for what purposes I came into this distant and strange land, and what little I have suffered for His cause." That very night a report was spread which

43. I, 234.

44. I, 249.

45. I, 263.

46. I, 263–264. NOT TO BE USED WITHOUT COPYRIGHT PERMISSION



prompted him to leave the city the next day. "Accordingly, I set out after dinner," he wrote, "and lay in a swamp till about sunset; but was then kindly taken in by a friend. My soul has been greatly humbled and blessed under these difficulties, and I thought myself like some of the old prophets who were concealed in times of public distress."⁴⁷ In the following days of that summer, he endured patiently what he called his "dumb and silent Sabbaths." He remembered that he once had thought "it would be death for me to keep silence from declaring the word of God; but now I am in a measure contented, and hope to see a day of liberty once again." Meanwhile, he spent his time in prayer, meditation, and reading.⁴⁸ His Delaware host, Judge Thomas White, was jailed for a time for entertaining Asbury. When Asbury was able later to return to the White home, he found himself on a Sunday with a mind "strangely twisted and tortured, not knowing what to do. It seems I know not how to fight, nor how to fly."⁴⁹

What emerged in this period of danger and enforced silence, however, was an awareness that the Anglican population of Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware among whom he was sheltered could never again accept British rule and were, on that account, permanently estranged from the Church of England. For many generations the English church and state had refused to provide them with a Bishop and had shown a remarkable lack of concern to supply them with able and upright clergymen. Asbury realized that his refusal to return to England gave him an opportunity to lead more and more of these Anglicans toward Methodism, if only he could hold back the enthusiasm of those young ministers who wanted to establish a separate Methodist sect at once, so as to be able to administer the sacraments to their people.

As the worst dangers of the Revolution passed, therefore, Asbury found himself crucially responsible for the pastoral guidance not only of hundreds of lay people but of a great group of young preachers, most of them born in America, whose enthusiasm needed a restraining hand. He assumed the task of restraining them without realizing that very soon he would become the bishop of a separate American denomination. His purpose at the time was simply to win as many souls as he could, particularly among the Anglicans, and to bring them into the discipline of the Methodist societies.



47. I, 265–266.

48. I, 267.

49. I. 269.

The controversy which broke out between Asbury and the preachers in Virginia displayed another source of his emerging powers of leadership: he dealt with conflict and contention in the Methodist societies and among the Methodist clergymen in the same spiritual way he confronted temptations to pride and self-will in his personal life.

One by-product of his emerging strategy for Methodism, Asbury wrote in Delaware in the Spring of 1779, was that some of the most wealthy families were very courteous and friendly to him. "Sundry persons of respectability attend my feeble exercises in public, and express satisfaction," he wrote. "But shall this satisfy, or lift me up? God forbid! If this should be the case, God will punish me for my folly."⁵⁰ A few days later, at a conference of preachers laboring north of the Potomac, the group "had great reason to fear that our brothers in the south were in danger of separating from us." Asbury helped compose "a soft, healing epistle" to them.⁵¹ Nevertheless, six weeks later, he received the minutes of the Virginia conference describing what he called "a lame separation from the Episcopal Church."⁵² Asbury continued his own preaching to rich and poor in Delaware, writing frequent letters to the "dissenting brethren in Virginia, hoping to reclaim them."⁵³ Meanwhile, his love and faithfulness to his close colleagues, especially to Freeborn Garrettson, grew steadily. He prayed each day, morning and evening, for "all the preachers and circuits in America," he wrote.⁵⁴ He knew during this period the wry humour of a man who was constitutionally pessimistic. He called himself once "a true prophet of evil tidings, as it suits my cast of mind."⁵⁵

Nevertheless, in the crucial negotiations Asbury's leadership was deeply spiritual. He worked throughout the spring and summer of 1780 on plans for a reconciliation with the Virginia brethren. His occasional reunions with Methodist preachers from afar found him "more moved than ever before, with leaving and meeting my friends." These, he added, were "humbling times," which made the Christians love one another.⁵⁶ In April, 1780, the Maryland preachers met in Baltimore.

50. I, 300; cf. p. 297.

51. I, 300.

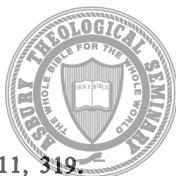
52. I, 304.

53. I, 307.

54. I, 379; cf. pp. 309, 311, 319.

55. I, 376.

56. I, 346.



They first concluded to renounce the Virginia secessionists. Asbury proposed instead conditions of union, namely, that the Virginians should not ordain any more; that they should come no farther North than Hanover circuit; that they should not presume to administer the sacraments where there was "a decent Episcopal minister;" and that they should join in plans for a union conference. The other ministers would not agree to these concessions, however, though they acknowledged that "it was like death to think of parting" with their Virginia colleagues. Asbury, almost at the point of despair, hit upon the idea of proposing that the Virginians suspend the sacraments for one year and see if the group could find a way to preserve the bond of Methodist unity during that period.⁵⁷

When his colleagues agreed to this plan, Asbury and Garrettson journeyed to the Virginia conference, their minds heavy with doubts it would be accepted but hoping God's grace would prove "almighty." When permitted to speak, Asbury read Wesley's thoughts against separation from the Church of England; showed his private letters of instruction from Wesley; read the epistles and other expressions of sentiment from the Delaware and Baltimore conferences; and preached a tender sermon. "They wept like children," Asbury wrote, "but kept their opinions." He and Garrettson returned them to their lodgings, "under the heaviest cloud I ever felt in America." The next day they returned to say goodbye and found that while Asbury had been praying alone that morning the Virginians "had been brought to an agreement" to accept the proposal and to suspend their secession for one year.⁵⁸ There followed a joyous tour by Asbury through Virginia, during which he visited Devereaux Jarratt, who, being an Anglican clergyman himself, had had no part of the separation movement. Asbury preached everywhere the doctrine of perfect love, amidst "divine calm and friendly sweetness."⁵⁹ The event was crucial, Asbury realized. Fore-stalling the secession made it possible for John Wesley soon after to send Thomas Coke to bring about the orderly establishment of a separate denomination for American Methodists under circumstances which gave at least some chance of drawing a large number of former Anglicans into the fold.



57. I, 347.

58. I, 348-350.

59. I, 350-352.

The healing of the Virginia division constitutes from the point of view of this paper simply another example of how one Christian bishop achieved and exercised leadership—by being truly religious. In this as in so much else in his ministry, Asbury revealed the base of his power to lie in caring for others, in being open about himself, and in showing a readiness to accept all such correction as did not violate either the word of God or the Methodist discipline. He was utterly dedicated to the highest aim of the Methodist ministers, namely, to share the love of the Lord, Jesus Christ, with the people God had given them to serve.

Delivered at The Francis Asbury Convocation, Wilmore, Kentucky, on October 28, 1971.



BOOK BRIEFS

Listening to the Church, A Realistic Profile of Grass Roots Opinions, by Virgil Wesley Sexton. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971. 158 pages. \$2.75 (paperback).

This book relays a message to the church from its basic constituency. The author, working through the Section of Planning, within the United Methodist Church, here publishes the results of a "talk-back" from local churches, involving thousands of persons in the church's constituency across the nation. Some readers will be disturbed by what young people think of the "establishment." Some church boards will wince at what the survey says about needed changes. Criticisms and questions of course need to be faced realistically if the church is to meet the needs of our generation. But one wishes that more specific statistical evidence had been advanced to support some of the findings of the survey.

The Christian Revolutionary, by Dale W. Brown. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971. 147 pages \$2.45 (paperback).

The author presents a careful analysis of some of the issues raised by radicals, and he relates his Christian faith and heritage to the practical concerns involved. Current radicalism is seen as related to the Social Gospel Movement, the Death of God controversy, Anabaptism, and sectarian Christianity.

Signs of the Times, by A. Skevington Wood. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971. 126 pages. \$1.25 (paperback).

Signs of Christ's Coming, by Carl Armerding. Chicago: Moody Press, 1971. 126 pages. \$.50 (paperback).

The first book sets forth in non-technical language a Biblical scholar's view of God's signs against the background of contemporary events. The second discusses events and crises of the last days as they affect Israel, and the return of Christ that will reverse the world situation.

The Jesus Revolution, by William S. Cannon with Introduction by John R. Bisagno. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971. 144 pages. \$4.95.

The intent of this book is to provide pastors and others in the church with an immediate, positive approach to the Jesus Revolution. The author believes that unless the church can latch on to this movement and keep it doctrinally straight, it will miss its greatest opportunity ever. Much of the content of the book is a report first-hand from the young people themselves. Some chapter headings: The Supernatural Jesus, Enthusiasm: Manna? or Menace?, Who Are the Jesus Revolution People?



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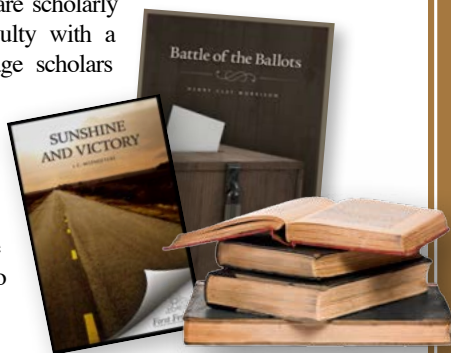
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